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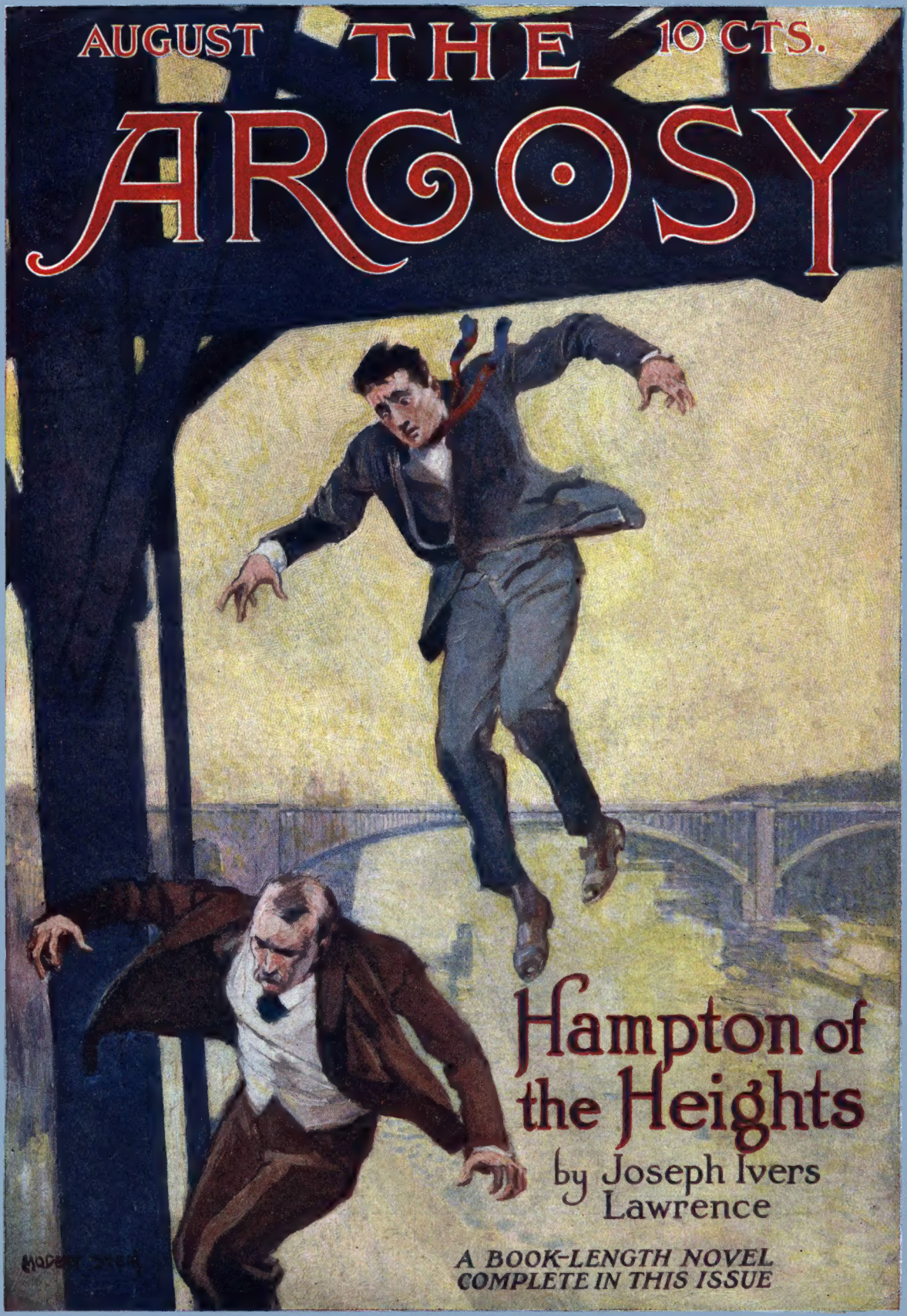

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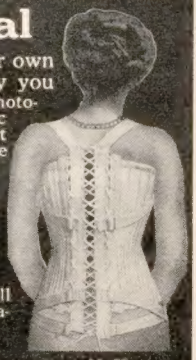

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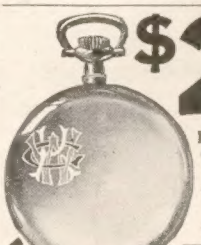

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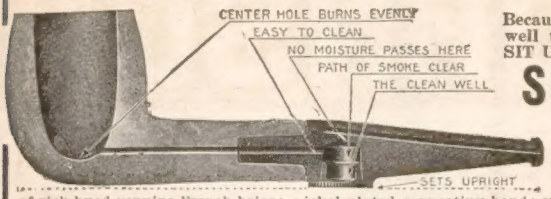

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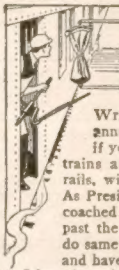

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXXXIII AUGUST, 1916 No. 1

Hampton of the Heights

by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.

CHAPTER I.

OUT OF THE WHIRLPOOL.

JERRY HAMPTON started out of his twilight reverie and strained his eyes into the shadows that mantled the river. A moment before he had noticed a canoe gliding dreamily down the current, steered by a lone paddler; his vision had recorded it merely as a part of the gentle movement of the softly silent landscape, and it had merged with the night mists without sensibly diverting the trend of his thoughts.

Now, at the end of the finger of rock which extended into the river there was new movement; the water was splashed and thrown about, and something alive and vigorous took issue with the ceaselessly battling currents that swirled around the point.

Jerry Hampton, startled, but vaguely mystified, rose from his seat on the ledge and strolled out to the end of the tongue of rock. The canoe, faintly remembered, was bobbing about, inverted, in the petulant eddies and a man was striving for his life with that miniature maelstrom.

The sounds of the struggle indicated a robust vigor, but from the mouth of the victim there came not a single cry of terror or appeal. Hampton observed this

and wondered at it, but this did not keep him from tearing off his coat, waistcoat and shoes. In an instant he was sharing the perils of the whirlpool with the unfortunate stranger.

He swam strongly and fought shrewdly against the pull of the voracious eddies. The place had been a part of his environment for many years; he had seen men and children drawn fatally into that treacherously playful network of ripples, but he knew it so well that he sported with it in its own game.

When it caught his feet and drew him downward with insinuating gentleness he threw himself back and made a detour, to try another approach. When it grasped him with angry impatience he struck out stoutly and battled his way out of the embrace.

The unknown man saw him, or heard him, through the dusk, and rallied his flagging strength. His head and arms sank from view once, but reappeared, and the two men strained hearts and muscles, the one as eager to give succor as the other to receive it.

Jerry came so near to the man presently that he saw his bearded face; then watery tentacles seized his legs and pulled him beneath the surface. In that moment of desire to help another he had grown heedless of the rules of the game.

He turned over in the blinding flood and dived for the rocky bottom, and when he rose it was to the calmer surface outside the danger zone. He had taken up the play again and won the trick.

Undaunted, full of grim challenge, he struck in once more, giving buffet for buffet. The stranger was new to the game and losing fast, but losing like a sportsman. He sank again, and rose with less vigor, but he played the last moves with resolution.

He gained a yard, and Jerry matched it; then their cold, cramped hands met and clasped, and the fiendishly chuckling whirlpool failed to break the bond. Jerry braced himself, expecting the frenzied tackle of the drowning man, but he misjudged the stranger; the face, now brought close to his own, was white and strained, but there was no madness in it.

Two to one now! The whirlpool's chuckle became savage; it resented the puny impudence that held out so long. Jerry lifted his face above the boiling foam and took a breath.

"Let yourself go!" he gasped.

The man, obedient and trusting, relaxed. Jerry held him, and plunged. They had no breath to spare, but they went down into the blackness of the night water and fought their way into the still shadows. They rose again, and the angry gurgles of the checkmated whirlpool sounded far off.

Jerry swam now, bearing an inert burden. His feet sought and found a shelving beach. He staggered ashore and fell prone with the senseless body of his partner in the game that was won.

Five minutes of rest and air revived the rescuer and restored him to action. The man by his side was half drowned, and he proceeded to employ the methods of professional life-savers.

Although well-nigh exhausted himself, he worked with great earnestness of purpose, and the stranger's respiration became discernible again, his pulses throbbed and in the course of an hour he opened his eyes and was conscious.

The moon peeped over the tree-tops back of the beach, and looked down on the two men as they sat on the broad, flat rocks. Fantastic arabesques of dusky black and pale silver and misty blue fluttered about them, the river wavelets laved the shore gently, and the discomfited eddies murmured sullenly at the end of the rocky point.

"You're a brave man!" said the stranger, with the thick hoarseness of one who finds his voice after long silence. "It is hard to say what—what one feels in such a case. I'm very grateful!"

Jerry Hampton was embarrassed. He waved his hands in a gesture of deprecation.

"I'm glad you're alive," he answered,

slowly. "Your canoe is lost, I think. Canoes won't stand pounding on the rocks very long."

"That's a small matter," returned the man with a shrug. "It was a toss-up an hour ago whether I'd ever need a canoe again. It looked for a few minutes as though I should bother no one but the coroner. Thanks to you, I shall now go on needing food and clothes and shelter. My name, by the way, is Exmoor—Irving Exmoor."

Jerry acknowledged the introduction with a courteous bow.

"My name is Jeremiah Hampton," he returned simply. "I think," he added, "that we'd better move as soon as you feel able. We shall get chilled through here, and you must be in pretty bad shape. If you want to wait I'll go and find some sort of a carriage for you."

"No, no!" the man replied, almost sharply; "don't do that! My recuperative powers are unusual; I shall be able to walk. You may know of some small road-house, or something like that, where I can get a room without attracting attention. I look so much like a weather-beaten scarecrow that I wouldn't like to appear among many people."

"If you like, you may come home with me," said Jerry. "There's no one there but my grandmother, and I think we can get there without being seen by any one that would especially notice us. It's dark nearly all the way, and it isn't very far to walk. I take it that you don't live anywhere around here, Mr. Exmoor."

"No—no, I don't live—anywhere around here," the man replied in a peculiarly abstracted way, and said no more.

Jerry was puzzled, if not a trifle piqued, by the mystery thus lugged into the case. He was tempted to ask the man bluntly where he did live, but his sense of courtesy prohibited open curiosity.

Exmoor's clothing was shapeless in its waterlogged condition, and it clung to his frame in a ludicrous manner, but the observer could see that it was of excellent quality. The white outing shirt was of silk, the coat and trousers were of gray flannel, and the low shoes were white buckskin.

The man's pale face, with its large, frank eyes, brown mustache, and pointed beard, showed refinement, and his manner spoke of authority and distinction.

"You are a young man, Mr. Hampton," Exmoor said suddenly, "and you have done a very courageous and gallant thing. It's natural for men, and especially young men, to enjoy the praise that is one of the rewards of gallantry. According to custom, your picture should appear in every newspaper to-morrow, with an account of your achievement, and it would be little enough glory for what you have done. I cannot even ask you to forego such notoriety, for it is your right, but for reasons of my own I shun publicity."

Jerry regarded him narrowly, a little coldly.

"I don't care for notoriety, though I have no reason to fear it," he returned. "I didn't pull you out of the water to win glory or praise. It's unlikely that I'd run to the newspapers and tell them all about it, and I'm pretty sure that there were no witnesses. The thing seems to be between you and me absolutely."

"I'm sorry that I have to appear mysterious," said Exmoor; "I can't deny that I am talking to you in circles. As it is, you would do no more than is logically right if you went to the police station and reported the affair. If your conscience urges you to do so, I can't raise any objection, but I must beg leave to part with you here. I can only thank you and go away; then your next move is entirely up to you. You are a person of good manners, you speak and act like a well-bred man, so I should hesitate to suggest any reward of a substantial nature—"

Jerry interrupted him.

"You are right about that," he declared. "I would not accept pay for helping a man out of trouble. I don't think we need talk about it much more. If you are able to walk and you wish to go away by yourself, my part of the affair

is finished. I don't see why I should go to the police or give myself any anxiety about you, *Mr. Exmoor.*"

His emphasis on the name caused the other to start.

"You may suspect that I gave you an assumed name," he said soberly, "but I did not. We were just back from the shadow of death, and I gave you my name frankly, as from one gentleman to another; suspicion and duplicity come after such great moments are over. Well, then, Mr. Hampton, I think I shall leave you, after offering you all the thanks I can give out of my heart."

He got up stiffly, painfully, and a chill shook him from head to foot as he stood erect. He held out his hand and took a step toward his rescuer, but he staggered, reeled drunkenly and sat down again abruptly.

"You see you are not able to take care of yourself by any means," Jerry said compassionately. "Come, we must go where it's warmer, and you must have something to brace you. Forget all about the newspapers and the police, and come with me."

"You're very good, Mr. Hampton!" Exmoor declared. "Suppose I give you my word that I am not a fugitive from justice, or anything like that? Will you accept it? I do not fear the police for what they mean to a malefactor, but I must avoid publicity. Beyond that, I am sorry to be obliged to keep you in the dark."

"I don't require any oath from you," Jerry replied; "I am willing to let things rest as they are. If you want my word, however, I give it to you freely; I will not mention this affair to any one. I am inviting you to my home, to offer you hospitality, because you are in distress. There is nothing more to say, Mr. Exmoor."

Jerry helped the man to his feet and forgot his own exhaustion in the task of supporting him as they slowly climbed the rocks and entered a dark, tree-arched path. Following this, they came presently to a road and Jerry turned his charge northward and followed the narrow footway for a while.

A motor-car raced past them, blinding them with its glare of light, and they shrank into the deeper shadows, but the car's occupants were bent on speed and some interesting destination; there was no fear that they would stop to investigate two plodding wayfarers.

With the unerring topographical sense of an Indian, Jerry led his companion into blank darkness, on the right of the road, and their feet found a narrow trail that wound steeply upward. The climb told on Exmoor and he breathed heavily, but when the guide suggested a rest he declared that he would keep on his feet and continue going.

There was a castle on a plateau at the top of the ascent, a structure of dark stone, with a watch-tower, and Exmoor gathered spirit enough to pass comment upon it.

"A castle adds to the romantic tone of this extraordinary affair, doesn't it?" he said. "We might be in the Rhineland or in the Scottish highlands."

"There is almost everything around here that is interesting and inspiring," Jerry answered, with a note of solemn reverence in his voice. "If you get tired of scenery, you can let your mind go back to the people that have walked on this same ground. The Indians watched the ships of the first white men from these hills. Washington's men fell by hundreds where we are now walking, and some of these trees grow out of the graves of Hessians and British grenadiers."

East of the castle and its grounds there were more trees and denser darkness, and the stranger found himself descending a steeper grade than the one he had climbed. He stumbled frequently and struggled weakly at every step, and Jerry was forced almost to carry him.

The downward path ended at a much-traveled highway, and they crossed it slowly, heading for another hill, to the dismay of Exmoor.

"Hurry!" exclaimed Jerry encouragingly; "there's an auto coming."

Exmoor obeyed with nervous alacrity, but three-quarters of the way over the thoroughfare his shuffling feet failed him; he stumbled and pitched to his knees.

Simultaneously there was a frenzied cry from Jerry Hampton and the raucous blare of an automobile horn. Another man cried out sharply, machinery clanked, brakes ground their way into place, and Jerry dragged his companion away from something little short of actual contact with the motor-car's wheels.

A woman sprang suddenly from the rear seat and flew to the prostrate man. She wore a long, loose coat, and a veil fluttered from her toque, but one needed only a glance to see that she was young and of rather distinguished bearing.

"Then we did strike him!" she cried sorrowfully.

Jerry stood up and bowed deferentially, after a momentary start of recognition.

"Miss Delroy!" he exclaimed, and added hastily: "No, your car was stopped just in time. But this man is ill and he fell in trying to get out of the way."

The girl stepped forward and leaned down toward the prostrate figure, with murmurs of sympathy and regret, but Exmoor blundered suddenly to his feet and drew away from her.

"I'm quite all right now, thank you," he said feebly. "There's no harm done. We'll go on, Mr. Hampton, if you don't mind."

"You are taking your friend to your home, Mr. Hampton?" queried the girl.

Jerry answered affirmatively.

"Why then you must get right into my car and let me carry you there!" she exclaimed. "That's the least I can do! It's odd—isn't it?—that I should come so near having a serious accident, and that I should find you so nearly a victim of my recklessness, Mr. Hampton. Harry is really a careful chauffeur, but I have to confess, in justice to him, that I had just told him to put on a little more speed."

"There's absolutely no harm done," reiterated Exmoor a bit coldly. "It was in no way your fault, at any rate. Thank you for offering us the use of your car, but I'm all right, now, and Mr. Hampton and I can go on without any difficulty."

"But I really want to do you that small service," insisted the girl. "Won't you please get into the car, Mr.—"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Delroy," broke in Hampton, confused and chagrined because he had not thought of introducing his new found friend. "May I present Mr.—"

"My name is Tarleton, Miss Delroy!" Exmoor interrupted, speaking almost sharply in his haste to check Jerry's utterance. "Will you let me thank you again for your kindness, and pardon me if I repeat that I need no further help?"

Something in his tone discouraged the girl from further insistence.

"Well, if you'd really rather walk, I suppose I can't force you to ride," she said. "I'm very glad you were not hurt, Mr.—er—Mr. Tarleton."

She reentered her car, bade Jerry a cordial good night, and rode away, cautioning her chauffeur as they started to keep to a soberer pace.

Exmoor, stronger and quite self-sufficient for the moment, turned like a flash upon Jerry.

"Who was that girl?" he demanded.

Jerry resented the tone.

"You heard me call her Miss Delroy," he answered curtly.

"I know," said Exmoor, "but—Oh, you see what I mean! I am not merely curious, but—whose daughter is she? Does she live in this neighborhood? I'm not an inquisitive cad, Hampton! I have reasons for—"

"Miss Delroy is the daughter of Milton Delroy," Jerry announced icily. "Mr. Delroy is a retired business man, and they live just above here. It's no secret, I'm sure."

Exmoor struck one hand sharply into the palm of the other.

"Why did I ask?" he muttered. "I

might have known! These things don't happen by chance!"

CHAPTER II.

MYSTERY.

"YOU spoke of your grandmother," said Exmoor, after a long silence, as they breasted another hill. "It is as distasteful to me as it must be to you, to have so much mystery, but if it is necessary for me to meet her, would you mind introducing me as Mr. Tarleton? Of course if I have stirred too much suspicion in your mind, it is not too late for me to leave you now. It would be the decent thing for me to do, without doubt."

"Your actions, and the things you have said, could hardly inspire confidence," Jerry returned frankly, "but my invitation still stands. You cannot yet take care of yourself, and I wouldn't think of leaving you alone. I will try to speak of you as Mr. Tarleton in future, and I suppose I have no right to concern myself with your affairs. A man shouldn't demand references from a helpless traveler who claims his hospitality."

The other murmured some casual expressions of gratitude, but he was still ill at ease.

"Pardon me again," he said, "but in regard to your servants: I suppose they will be quite likely to see me?"

"We have no servants," Hampton responded gravely. "My grandmother and I live alone."

Exmoor did not conceal his surprise.

"I mean no offense," he said apologetically, "but from your manner—everything about you, you know—I had you placed in some old manor house—something like that castle we passed back there. I don't mean you to take that as idle flattery, either, Mr. Hampton."

Jerry laughed, but with little humor, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You must prepare for a rather startling disappointment, Mr. Tarleton," he rejoined. "We do not live in any castle."

They finished their climb and crossed another small plateau while they were talking, and they came presently to a tract of land enclosed on its four sides, apparently, by a high board fence. The fence was lavishly, but not esthetically, decorated with glaring designs and vivid splashes of the primary colors, and one who gave it his attention was urged to give trial to sundry beverages, cereal-foods, patent nostrums, and an all-surpassing brand of chewing-gum.

Exmoor noticed the militant advertisements and smiled.

"Such things as that rather jar the harmony of a Rhineland or a Scottish landscape, don't they?" he remarked.

Jerry laughed bitterly.

"How would you like such a wall as that around your castle?" he inquired.

Exmoor looked at him curiously. "I don't quite understand—"

Jerry stopped abruptly at a door in the fence, cleanly flush with its surface and almost concealed by the gaudy poster pasted over it.

"This is the entrance to the courtyard of my castle," he announced.

Exmoor was amazed, but he concealed his feelings carefully.

"Good cheer and hospitality depend on the host, and not the surroundings, Mr. Hampton," he said cheerily, and followed his guide through the aperture in the fence.

It was darker in the large rectangle enclosure, but the rays from a solitary street-lamp outside the fence lighted up dimly an extraordinary scene.

A populous city block, with all the attributes of congested urban life, picked up and transplanted to a spot in the middle of a desert or of a forest, would be startling and incongruous to contemplate: this scene was the reverse of that, but it was no less astounding. A tiny, rather ramshackle farm house, with crumbling shingles and weatherbeaten sides, stood near the middle of the rectangle. Smoke curled lazily from its low chimney, and a light shone from one of the two front windows.

Beyond this structure stood a smaller one, which might serve as a stable for a horse or a cow, and beyond that was a lean-to from which extended a wire-enclosed run for poultry.

To the south of the cottage Exmoor could see dimly a plotted lay-out of plowed ground, quite evidently a truck garden, and he detected in the night air a smell of green herbage and freshly-turned earth.

The two men stood just within the entrance, silent, while the stranger contemplated the picture. The latter was the first to speak.

"I perceive, Mr. Hampton," he said, guarding his tone from any note of condescension or irony, "that you are an agriculturist."

Jerry did not reply to the pleasantry.

"This is my home, Mr. Tarleton," he said, soberly. "It is known, by the way, as 'Washington Grange.' Some wag gave it that name long ago, and it has stuck."

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed the stranger, impressed anew with the novelty of the place as he glanced around it a second time. "By Jove! Once inside that fence, I don't know but you would have some difficulty in convincing me that we are still in New York City."

"Listen, and you can hear the rumble of the subway," Jerry said whimsically; "it's almost under our feet. Over there, east of the fence, the surface cars run at three-minute intervals."

"I am not familiar with New York," said Exmoor, "and I must say that I am bewildered by everything around me. When my canoe treated me so shabbily, I scarcely knew where I was. I could see the city lights, and I knew the locality in a general way, but the place where I landed —or rather, where you landed me—was as wild and primitive as Adirondack country."

"Fort Washington Park," explained Jerry.

Exmoor nodded.

"Then," he went on, "we did quite a bit of roughing it, up hill and down dale, you know, to get here. We saw a castle, strips of forest, a few brier patches—Oh, almost everything that doesn't go with a metropolis, according to the popular idea."

"The last wide avenue we crossed—where we had the experience with the motor-car — was Broadway," remarked Jerry, beginning to enter into the humor of the moment. "There aren't quite as many white lights at that point as you'll find at Times Square, but a few more years will bring them. They will be building sky-scrapers there before we know it!

"But we both seem to forget that you are a sick man," he added anxiously. "Come into the house; you can see 'the farm' better by daylight."

He gave Exmoor his arm again, and they went up to the porch of the cottage and Jerry unlocked the door.

"Your supper's been cold these two hours, Jerry; where, for the land's sake, have ye been?"

The challenge came from an inner apartment in a tremulous, high-pitched, but rather pleasant voice.

Jerry stepped quickly to the open door of the room.

"I have brought a guest home to supper, grandmother," he said, gently. "It's Mr. Tarleton; you've never met him, but he needs your sort of care. He was canoeing and got upset. I got a little wet in helping him out of the water, so some hot supper is just what we need."

Before he had finished speaking there was a clatter of hurriedly moved furniture, the throwing down of a book or work-basket and a patter of slippered feet. Exmoor looked up, vaguely embarrassed, and saw upon the threshold a fine, upstanding, self-possessed old lady—a type from one of Franz Hal's portraits.

She was in trim and dignified black, and wore a white apron and a small lace cap.

She opened her eyes wide with surprise.

"Why, it's a gentleman!" she blurted out, and was instantly covered with confusion for speaking her thoughts.

Exmoor bowed ceremoniously.

"I hope I may live up to the title, madam," he said.

"I'm sure I ask your pardon for speaking right out like that, Mr. Tarleton," went on the old lady quaintly. "Since we lived here—an' that's going on ten years! —we haven't had a chance to see very many gentlefolk. I never know just what to expect. Jerry, he's got very queer ideas and he's like as not to bring a tramp or a peddler home to supper.

"Any one that's hungry has got to be fed, he thinks; and I suppose that really is the most Christian way of looking at it. I must say, though, that when I was a young woman and all our folks were in better circumstances—we all lived in Connecticut then—over round New London — and though we were always known to be just as free-handed as anybody, we—"

"Pardon me, grandmother," broke in Jerry, half fearful of offending her, "but Mr. Tarleton has been feeling ill, and I think he should sit down. He will spend the night with us, I hope, and we shall be able to talk after supper, you see."

The grandmother was overcome with fresh contrition. She applied ignominious epithets to herself for a thoughtless old busybody, and insisted upon placing a rocking chair for the guest and helping him to get settled among its cushions.

"First off, Mr. Tarleton," she said with sprightly good humor, "I don't think there's anything better for chills and a new-caught cold than a good bowl of ginger-tea. Plenty of ginger in it, and good and hot. My mother used to give it to us just like that every time—"

"I think that will be fine for Mr. Tarleton," Jerry interrupted, with a twinkle in his eye, "and the sooner he gets it the better he will feel. I'll have some of it, too."

It was ten o'clock when supper was laid on the table.

The two men ate with relish, and the hostess took the burden of the conversation.

Exmoor was silent, and Jerry knew that he was beginning to feel the secondary reaction from the strain he had undergone. The guest admitted presently that he wanted nothing so much as rest and sleep, and Jerry rose promptly and went up the narrow stairs to prepare a bed for him.

The house had but two rooms under the roof, so that the host was forced to share his own chamber with the guest. He made the bed ready for him, then got an extra mattress and improvised a cot for himself.

"That cot on the floor was made to my measure apparently," observed Exmoor, when he was brought up.

"But the bed is what I offer you, nevertheless," said Hampton quickly. "I have slept on the bed nearly twenty-eight years, and the change will be agreeable."

"Nothing of the sort!" protested the other. "You embarrass me, Mr. Hampton, and make me feel the enormity of my intrusion."

"Consider the situation reasonably," Hampton argued good humoredly. "You should know that nothing touches a man's vanity more nearly than his sense of hospitality; he craves the feeling that he is sacrificing something for his guest."

"I wouldn't hurt that sort of vanity for the world!" Exmoor declared genially, "so I'll tumble into the bed without another protest. I fancy, Mr. Hampton, that if I had stopped at that baronial castle on the hill I should scarcely have found a more gracious host. When I see something approaching the grand manner, the open hand, nowadays, my faith in heredity grows stronger. I can picture your father as something of a courtier in his time, one of the gallants who were not afraid to show good manners openly."

Jerry was removing and carefully folding his clothes, and noting with regret their damp and rumpled condition. His back was turned toward Exmoor, and he did not look around.

"I don't remember my father very well," he said slowly. "I don't think I saw him after I was two years old. But he was a gentleman and a man of some distinction, they say, when he wasn't too far gone in drink. My mother was forced to leave him, and he didn't last long after that."

"Your grandmother has the distinction," remarked Exmoor; "it's something that is never lost, you know."

Jerry was bending down, unlacing his boots.

"She is my maternal grandmother," he informed the other.

"Ah, I beg your pardon," said Exmoor. "I gathered, in some way, that she was Mrs. Hampton."

"She *is* Mrs. Hampton," explained Jerry, busy with the other boot. "When my mother left my father she resumed her family name and gave it to me. My father's name was Stephen Beauchamp."

A sharp thud on the floor, and the tinkling of broken glass brought Jerry to his feet with a nervous start. Exmoor had taken a glass from the table, where Jerry had placed it with a pitcher of water, and it had fallen to the floor.

"Never mind that!" Jerry exclaimed, to relieve his guest's confusion; "I'll get another glass."

Exmoor was trembling slightly.

"It seems," he said awkwardly, "that—that my nerves are so unstrung that I can't pick up anything. Don't bother about another glass; I'd better be in bed and asleep before I do any more damage."

CHAPTER III.

THE BLOW FALLS.

AT breakfast next morning Exmoor showed symptoms of a trifling cold, but was vastly improved in general condition, while Jerry Hampton was quite himself again. The grandmother presided over the coffee-pot with not a little ceremony, and dealt out smoking pancakes with an excess of liberality.

The milk and cream, Exmoor learned, were home products; there was actually a cow in the stable back of the cottage, and the lusty crowing of a cock established the fact that the poultry yard was tenanted.

The old lady spoke frequently with naive naturalness of "the farm," and evidently saw no humor in its existence in such an environment.

"There's a lot of fine houses all around here," she said, "and more of 'em growing up over night, but I wouldn't give up this place for any of 'em. We got a cow, an' chickens, an' a garden, and you can't have such comforts as them if you live in one o' these city houses—t' say nothing of what they call their *apartment* houses; *they're* nothing but great big wasps' nests!"

"I have seen the farm only in the dark as yet," Exmoor said, "but I am sure that it is picturesque and a very pleasant place to live in. I hope the city won't crowd in and press you so close that the farm will be spoiled."

"The high fence keeps me from seeing out and worrying about all the things around here," replied the grandmother. "This property, of course, is pretty valuable, and one of these days they'll come and tear up the garden and build one o' them wasps' nests all over it; but I don't think that Jerry would hear to such a thing while I was alive. When I'm gone, then he can sell all the land and be just about as rich as any one, I guess."

Exmoor's eyebrows went up in an involuntary start of surprise.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, with unaffected interest, "Mr. Hampton didn't tell me that he owned this property. By Jove!" he added, turning to Jerry, "you are to be classed as a landed proprietor!"

A ruddy flush spread over Jerry's face, and he strove to cover his confusion with a spirited attack upon the pancakes piled before him. He offered no reply, but smiled rather uncomfortably.

"This piece o' land," the old lady went on enthusiastically, "is worth two hundred thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent, and it's going up all the time. Twenty years ago it was worth about a thousand dollars—think of that! It's hard to believe how things change in just a few years!

"All this was 'way out in the country then; but now the trolley cars run all round here, and the subway station's al-

most across the street; people seem to think it's right in the city, an' I suppose it is, though there's still a lot of rocks an' trees an' green grass all around. I don't let myself think about it very much. Sometimes I try to sort o' figure out how it all come about, but I get all mixed up over it."

Exmoor agreed that the times and the customs were indeed perplexing, and the grandmother rambled on more or less garrulously to the end of the meal. Jerry was silent for the most part.

Exmoor admitted a desire to see the farm by daylight, and the two men went out, the guest wearing a suit that Jerry insisted on lending him until his own damp and rumpled clothes could be put in order. A man—quite a typical farmhand—was hoeing the serried rows of young plants, a trim little Jersey cow was tethered on a grass plot, and some two score fowls of fine feather paraded in their wire enclosure.

"I don't like to sail under false colors," Jerry said presently, as they stood contemplating the scene. "I was forced to countenance a misstatement by keeping silent, but I want to set it right now. My grandmother believes that we own this property, but we do not. It's bad enough that I have to lie to her, and keep bolstering up the lie with all sorts of deceptions, so I want to undeceive you as soon as I can."

Exmoor was interested, but he affected to dismiss the matter with a nod and a gesture of polite understanding.

"In families, and especially with old people," he said, "there are usually peculiar private matters that are not for outsiders to meddle with. You may freely consider that I have forgotten about it already, Mr. Hampton."

Jerry shook his head.

"I'd rather explain," he said seriously. "I don't care to have you think that I would lie to an old lady in a spirit of cheap vanity, or to keep up a foolish illusion. My father once owned this land, but not for long. It was not valuable in those days, and this house stood vacant for a number of years. My mother was deluded into thinking that my father still owned it, and that he had given it to her.

"I understand that he had a fine lordly way of giving things away without much attention to his own title in them. When we had no other place to go, my mother brought us to this house. She died soon after that, and my grandmother and I continued to live here. The owner, it seems, didn't mind; we were regarded as harmless 'squatters,' and the place was not even dignified as rentable property. We knew nothing of business—of deeds and taxes and that sort of thing, so nothing bothered us. We got a meager living from the truck garden, and the cow and chickens.

"But one day," he continued, "when I was just about old enough to comprehend things, a man came along and informed me that we must begin to pay rent or vacate the premises. My grandmother didn't see him, fortunately, and after I got over my astonishment and rage he explained it all to me. He had owned the land for years, and we had been camping on it with no more right to the privilege than gipsies or other vagabonds."

"I understand perfectly," broke in Exmoor. "Your grandmother was contented and proud of the place in her old-fashioned way: I dare say knowing the truth might have killed her."

"That's it exactly," Jerry agreed. "I told the man that she would never live through such a shock. He was really a very decent fellow and I went away with him to talk it over. He was paying taxes on the land, and he felt that it was time for him to get some return. It was still comparatively wild country here, but the house was in good order and he felt that it ought to yield revenue, however little. We had mighty little money, but I planned to go to work and earn some, and I agreed to pay the man ten dollars a month if he would stay away from the house and help me to keep the whole thing a secret from my grandmother."

Exmoor smiled a little sadly.

"I am very glad that I could hear the story, Mr. Hampton," he said. "Forgive me if I say that I had put you down as a rather unusual man—a bit picturesque and romantic, in these times. Now, you have added another chapter. I am sure that you *are* an unusual man; some would call you quixotic and impractical, I suppose, but I'm glad, for more reasons than one, that I met you. I can imagine the trials you have had. It must have been hard, while you were a mere boy, to keep up even a rental of ten dollars."

Jerry nodded.

"I worked in a drug store in Harlem," he explained, "and with my wages I eked out a rather poor living from the farm here. I had to take care of the garden and the stock at night and early in the morning. When I was about twenty I wanted more time to study, so I gave up my job and tried to get a real income out of the farm."

Exmoor cast his eye over the place speculatively.

"And do you really get a living here?" he asked.

"A better one than you would think," was the answer, "and the rental has gone up, from time to time; it's twenty dollars a month, now, and it probably won't stop at that. You see, I employ a man who really knows how to till the soil. We sell milk and cream to some families in the neighborhood, and—"

"And eggs and broilers, of course," suggested the other, with growing interest.

"No, they don't get the eggs," answered Jerry smiling. "Instead of forty or fifty cents a dozen, I get five dollars per thirteen for my eggs. I started with a setting of prize-bred Buff Orpingtons, and now I win prizes on my own fowls and demand top prices for my eggs. My grandmother thinks that I am a captain of industry and finance."

"It's extraordinary!" declared Exmoor. "But I suppose that every obvious increase in your prosperity causes the rent to soar; that's the way with landlords."

"That is what worries me," said Jerry. "The rent may soar out of my reach, and then the crash will come. It would be worse, now, than it would have been years ago, you can see. If we had to leave this place, and my grandmother learned that we had been living here under such conditions, she would go mad.

"She has had so much trouble in her life that I want her to spend the rest of it in contentment. I am uneasy whenever I have to go to the landlord's house; I always fear an increase, or a notice to vacate the property. I have to go there this morning, by the way, and I shan't feel easy until it's over."

"Then you'd better go at once," said Exmoor pleasantly. "With your permission I'll stay here and enjoy this bit of concentrated country life until you return. You might ask your landlord for a ten-year lease at the present rental, while you're about it," he added jocularly.

"I have begged for a lease more than once," returned Jerry, "but now I would hesitate to bind myself for any length of time. I'm staying here merely for grandmother's sake. My ambitions are not bounded by this fence, and when I leave here I would like to have a chance to make a little noise in the world."

"Do you write?" asked Exmoor.

"Not much," was the answer, "but I intend to do so, and I'm studying all the time."

"I'm sure you'll make a noise in the world," said Exmoor, with conviction; "men of your stamp usually do!"

Hampton left his guest watching the aristocratic fowls, and walked down to the valley, where Broadway cars and honking automobiles have taken the place of the mail coaches and post-chaises of the more romantic days. He turned toward the river at Dyckman Street, then northward again, and climbed the wooded hill of the Inwood section—the northern extremity of Manhattan Island, where there are strips of miniature forest as primeval in aspect as though they were still the haunt of the painted Indian and the timber wolf.

He followed the winding road round the

hill, past new houses and old, scattered among the trees and rocks, and presently, at a spot from which he could see the blue and silver Hudson shimmering through the trees, he passed between some venerable gate-posts and approached a mansion that had lost little of its dignity and grandeur in the sixty-odd years of its service.

A maid servant answered his ring and ushered him into a high-walled parlor, furnished with conspicuous good taste in Tudor style, with somber hangings of heavy brocades at the doors and windows. The maid went to give his name to her master, and an instant later a young girl entered the house, just returned from morning horse exercise.

She caught sight of the visitor as she was passing the parlor door, and stopped.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Hampton!" she cried, in unaffected good spirits, and waved him a little salute with her riding-crop.

Jerry sprang forward to meet her, and she gave him her gloved hand with the same easy, rather boyish cordiality.

"I'm glad to see you looking so fit today," she remarked, "for you and your friend really showed signs of wear last night. I didn't want to seem inquisitive at the time, but you looked very much as though you had used your street-clothes for bathing suits. I might have indulged my curiosity a little more, but your friend —Mr. Tarleton, wasn't it?—seemed quite a bear. He simply wouldn't accept any help from me, and I think he was really very angry because my car came so near to running him down. Of course, he was not at all ill-mannered about it."

"I'm sure that he didn't mean to be," replied Jerry earnestly, "and I don't think that he was even angry. Your chauffeur was not at fault at all, and he stopped the car so quickly! Mr.—er—Mr. Tarleton was quite ill at the time, and you know that it's hard to keep up the best of manners when you're ill."

"I'm sorry," said the girl; "I suppose I forced him to talk when it would have been kinder to leave him alone. But I *am* curious this morning, Mr. Hampton, and you haven't given me any explanation of your own appearance last night. You usually look so well groomed that when you are rumpled up and disheveled it's bound to be noticed. I'm determined to have it that you had been through some spirited adventure."

Jerry fidgeted uncomfortably and laughed.

"Leave out the spirited, and just put it down as an ordinary adventure, if you can apply that term to a tumble into the water," he said.

"Ah!" Miss Delroy exclaimed banteringly, "one of you fell in, and the other came tumbling after! But what an extraordinary prank for two dignified grown men to indulge in! I'll wager that if the truth could be got at, one of you fell in, and the other pulled him out and saved his life, at great personal risk and with great gallantry. *And*, since you are so awfully reticent and uncomfortable about it, the inference is that you were the valiant rescuer."

"It's mighty pleasant to have you paint such a picture," said Jerry, recovering his poise, "but fact is very poor in gallantry compared with fiction. However, if I can be a hero in your imagination, it's worth living for."

"I see that I can get nothing out of you," she retorted; "and if you're turning to gallant speeches I suppose we must change the subject. How is your dear grandmother, and how is the wonderful farm getting on?"

"Both doing very well," answered the young man. "My working force of one is tilling the soil industriously and scientifically, and my live stock is thriving. The farm has very few visitors, by the way, and my grandmother's great ambition to be a hostess is not often gratified. Of course, when one lives on a farm, one can't expect much social life, but—"

The girl laughed merrily.

"I shall call on your grandmother very soon," she assured him, "and perhaps you will show me the fertile fields and the low-

ing kine again, if you happen to be there, of course."

"I shall hardly dare to leave the place for a moment, now, until you come!" Jerry declared, with more earnestness than humor.

Miss Delroy, who had barely turned eighteen, blushed in spite of herself, and her eyes fell before the eager glance of the man. The problem of a suitable reply was solved, however, by the appearance of her father in the doorway.

Milton Delroy, a spruce, dignified man of about fifty, paused on the threshold and regarded the two young people rather coldly.

"I am sorry that I had to keep you waiting so long, Mr. Hampton," he said formally, "but I see that my daughter took it upon herself to assume the responsibility of entertaining you. I have come, Eugenia, to apologize for my discourtesy and to relieve you. I believe that Mr. Hampton has business with me."

The girl's natural gaiety disappeared in her father's presence. She made no attempt to treat his reproving tone lightly, but bowed to the visitor soberly and left the room.

"I have brought you the rental, as usual, Mr. Delroy," said Jerry, handing the man two ten-dollar notes, and plainly desirous of getting the business over with as soon as possible.

Delroy took the money and slipped it carelessly into his waistcoat pocket.

"Sit down, Mr. Hampton," he said, "if you're not pressed for time, I would like a talk with you."

Jerry obeyed, and looked at the older man searchingly. Milton Delroy had known him now for some years, since he was a mere boy, but his manner toward him had never been cordial. He had always addressed him as "Hampton," or "Mr. Hampton," so the present stiffness of manner held no special significance upon the surface.

"I like to have the people around me as comfortable and contented as possible at all times," said Delroy, in a tone that belied the statement, "but circumstances will arise at times to interfere with such a desire. I have some news for you, Mr. Hampton, and I can scarcely call it good news."

The young man flushed vividly, unable to conceal his instant alarm.

"You mean," he said hoarsely, "that—"

"We won't beat about the bush," Delroy broke in curtly. "To make matters quite plain to you, I have received an offer of one hundred dollars a month for the land that you occupy. A thoroughly reliable man wishes to clear it up and establish an open-air motion-picture theatre, which will take nearly all of the ground. Of course, I appreciate what it may mean to you, and I'm really very sorry to give you trouble."

Jerry Hampton was pale now. It was not in him to plead with the man and beg for mercy on sentimental grounds, but he laid about desperately for some stay upon the impending disaster.

"I—I believe those open-air theatres are only open for business about four or five months of the year," he said. "Wouldn't that bring the rental down to something less than fifty dollars a month? The man could hardly afford to pay twelve hundred dollars a year for such a short season, could he?"

"He intends to arrange the place so that it may be converted into tennis courts or an ice-skating rink during the colder months," replied Delroy, a gleam of satisfaction in his eye. "He proposes to take a lease for five years at twelve hundred per year. You can see, Mr. Hampton, that it would be rather poor business for me to reject such an offer."

"I suppose," said Jerry dully, "that—the season is so far advanced now—that we couldn't stay there more than a month longer?"

"That is another unpleasant phase of the matter?" answered Delroy. "The work has to be begun at once, or part of the season will be lost. I can't possibly give you more than a week, Mr. Hampton. You'll have to find another place im-

mediately and vacate the property on or before a week from to-day."

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER THE COUNCIL TREE.

JERRY HAMPTON left the house with bowed head and sagging shoulders. He was naturally optimistic and his spirits usually rallied quickly against rebuffs, but this was the blow that he had dreaded for years. That it had long been expected and was in the logical order of things made it fall no less heavily.

Personal set-backs and discouragements he could weather and make the most of, but now he could see no ray of light. He was devoted to his cheery, fine-spirited grandmother, and the thought of confessing his secret to her and breaking her spirit all in a moment completely staggered him.

Reluctant to go home, he walked away from the Delroy house in the opposite direction. He dragged his feet wearily through the woods till he came to the shore of the placid inlet where the water stops to rest from the rush of Spuyten Duyvil.

He sat down on one of the benches that are there for the comfort of those who would contemplate the ancient Indian council tree, which, one is assured by the graven tablet, stood there when red was the prevailing flesh color on Manhattan Island, and witnessed many of the peace conferences of those times. The water rippled playfully on the narrow beach and some boats bumped lightly against the rude little landing stages, but Jerry felt none of the fascinations of the scene.

A dog barked back on the hill among the trees, and Jerry heard it running through the dry leaves a moment later. Presently it bounded into view on the steep path that led down from the hill, and he recognized it as the Delroys' Airedale terrier.

Eugenia Delroy followed close after the dog. She nodded and smiled at Jerry, as though she expected to find him there. To his surprise, she came straight to the bench and sat down beside him.

"What in the world are you going to do, Mr. Hampton?" she demanded, with childlike directness.

"Why, you're very good to ask," he responded, "but I'm sure I don't know. The thing has come upon me so suddenly; there's so little time left for anything. Do you—know all about it?"

"All that I could find out," she answered. "I knew from the sound of your voices in the parlor that something wasn't quite right, and I was sure that it was all wrong when I saw you leave the house in such a dejected way. I knew that father had increased your rent terribly, or that he had asked you to give up your farm, so I tried to make him tell me all about it.

"He wasn't in a communicative mood, but I did find out that 'the farm' had got to go all on account of some wretched movie business. I asked him what was to become of all your beautiful hens and roosters and that darling little cow, and your lettuce and celery and tomatoes and asparagus and everything — and — and what that poor dear old lady could ever do without her kitchen and her tea-pot and all the things that she's so fond of. He—he laughed! And *you* are laughing, too."

"I don't know why I should laugh; I beg your pardon," said Jerry soberly. "I'm immensely flattered that you should take my part so stoutly, Miss Delroy; and perhaps I laughed—if I did—for the same reason your father laughed; you're so young and frail-looking, you know, to show so much fire and spirit when you are aroused. But you really mustn't get yourself into trouble on my account."

"But what can you do?" she demanded again. "I've heard your grandmother boast about her farm; it's her very life! She would never live to go anywhere else and begin all over again; it couldn't be done. And that farm is one of the wonders of New York city! Just fancy tearing it all to pieces and planting a horrible movie theatre in its place! I can't im-

agine such a thing. What are you going to do, Mr. Hampton?"

"I am sure of only one thing," answered Jerry: "that I can't pay a hundred dollars a month to keep it out of the grasp of the movie man. And as that seems to be the only line along which there is any argument, my reasoning stops right there. I don't know what I can do in the least, Miss Delroy."

"I know that it looks rather bad for me to be here talking like this," said the girl gravely. "It looks as though I were ready to enter into a conspiracy against my father. And perhaps I am!" she added, her eyes flashing anew. "I never felt so utterly *against* him before in my life. I haven't done talking to him yet, either!"

Jerry was dangerously near to laughing again.

"I am more grateful to you for feeling like that than I could ever tell you, Miss Delroy," he rejoined, "but I don't think talking will do any good. Knowing your father as well as I do, I am sure that money would be the only effective argument. And we have no right to blame him for it. If business men were to consider the feelings of all the old ladies who like gardens and chickens and things, the progress of the real estate business would be very slow, wouldn't it? There might still be some little cottage standing on the site of the Singer building and the New York Central Railroad might have had to depress its tracks under some old-fashioned rose garden. It would be very idyllic and charming, but it wouldn't be New York.

"You see, if I were to go to your father and implore him to refuse the offer of twelve hundred a year and let me keep the place at the present rental, in consideration of my poor grandmother's feelings, he would think me several kinds of a fool, and I surely would be. Some men will do remarkable things, of course, just to satisfy the whims of their wives or daughters, but I think your father is too good a business man for that. And then, you see, I couldn't accept a favor like that; I couldn't let a girl beg for mercy for me and for my grandmother."

Eugenia tilted her chin to an angle of defiance.

"I suppose you are too proud to accept a favor even if it would save your grandmother's—well, perhaps her life," she said. "Well, I never meant to tell you, Mr. Hampton, but I did save you once! Father was going to tell you that he must have fifty dollars a month and I talked him out of it; I think I made him ashamed of himself. That was over a year ago, too."

Jerry flushed.

"I'm very grateful to you, Miss Delroy," he said, "but I wish you had not done it. I can't repay such kindness, you know."

"I assure you that I didn't do it on your account at all!" she returned sharply; "it was all for your grandmother. I could make father ashamed of himself again, too, but he's in one of his worst moods now. He's been frightfully troubled for two weeks or more, and as cross as a grizzly bear."

"That's too bad," said Jerry politely. "You see, we all have troubles of one sort or another. No matter how desperately worried I am, some one else is in far greater trouble. If I were to calm myself and go and explain the whole thing reasonably to my grandmother, she might take it philosophically and we might be comfortably settled in another place within a week. I must consider this part of the matter closed, at any rate. If your father is having business troubles, there's no doubt that he needs all the money he can get for the property, and I shouldn't dream of standing in his way."

"I don't think he really *needs* money," replied the girl, thinking hard. "He always seems to have plenty; there's always money coming in. But if anything goes wrong it puts him in an awful mood. He has a lot of business of some sort in the Middle West, and he has a man out there somewhere—sort of an agent, or manager, I think. He doesn't tell me much of anything about his business, but I can't help

hearing a good deal; he's always telephoning or talking to men that call at the house. It seems now that this man, whom he depends on so much, is missing, or something like that. Father has been writing letters and telegraphing all over the country, and he gets more worried and angry every day. I heard him tell one of his friends yesterday that if the man didn't report pretty soon he would squeeze him within an inch of his life."

"I am afraid," said Jerry uncomfortably, "that you are telling tales out of school, Miss Delroy."

She tossed her head flippantly.

"If you don't want to hear them you surely can go away!" she retorted. "I'm very certain that I am not telling anything that could do any harm, but I'm in such a rage at my father, Mr. Hampton, that I'd tell almost anything about him if it would help you to keep your farm. A daughter is supposed to love her father, but mine has never given me a chance even to get acquainted with him. When he is angry with some of his business men he says such frightful things to them that it scares me and I positively dislike him. I thought he would break the telephone last night. He called up the long-distance operator and he got in a raging temper because he had to wait. Then, when he got the person he wanted, he simply yelled: 'Have you found that *blank, blank* Exmoor yet?' and then—"

"What!" cried Hampton sharply, starting up in utter consternation.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Eugenia innocently. "He wanted to know if some one had found Mr. Exmoor—that is the name of the man that is missing, it seems; Mr. Irving Exmoor. I've seen father address lots of letters to him. It *is* a peculiar name, isn't it?"

"Very," assented Jerry, controlling himself.

"But you look so queer," remarked the girl. "Do you know anything about Mr. Exmoor?"

"The name seemed familiar," said Jerry quietly, "but I don't know any one in the Middle West. I'm in such a state of nerves generally that I'm likely to act queer over almost anything. I beg your pardon."

Eugenia was satisfied with the explanation.

"You poor chap!" she exclaimed sympathetically; "of course you're in a state of nerves, and I've done you precious little good by letting my tongue rattle on at such a rate. I suppose about all I am good for is to tell you how terribly sorry I am, and how very, very bad I feel for you and your grandmother."

"You really ought to tell me to brace up and not sit here mooning in the woods when there are things to be done," Jerry said briskly, trying to affect a lighter mood.

"With your last sentiment I heartily concur, Mr. Hampton." The words came from a point back of the bench where they were sitting, and the voice was all too familiar.

Jerry sprang up in confusion, demoralized for the moment.

Eugenia gave a slight start, then controlled herself admirably. She remained seated and turned her head just enough to glance rather haughtily at her father.

Milton Delroy stood on the rising ground at the edge of the little clearing about the historic tree. There was unmistaken anger in his deep, heavy-browed eyes, but he allowed his thin lips to twitch with a suspicion of a mocking smile.

"I have always respected you, Hampton," he said bitingly, "for a self-dependent, resourceful fellow. I thought you were sufficient to your own occasions. I am surprised and disappointed to find you moping and pouting like a boy because your toy farm is to be taken away from you."

"Perhaps Mr. Hampton is surprised and disappointed," remarked Eugenia spiritedly, "to find you creeping about on tiptoe to spy upon people!"

"Silence!" Delroy commanded angrily. "You have enough to explain to me, Eugenia, without adding further offense. Go home and wait for me there."

"The great question in my mind," retorted the girl, with a flippancy that almost forced a smile from Jerry, "is, how much did you hear?"

"Go home!" ordered the father, controlling his rage with evident difficulty.

Eugenia got up from the bench, but without undue haste.

"I'm sure that Mr. Hampton needs no help from me," she said airily, "and he may be able to express himself more freely if there is no woman present, so I'll go."

She bowed to Jerry as formally as though there was nothing irregular about the situation, called her dog to her, and went tripping up the steep path with a pretty nonchalance that brought a darker flush to the face of the irate parent.

"Now, what have you to say to me, sir?" demanded Delroy, coming forward a few paces.

Hampton had regained his self-possession. He stood with his hands in the pockets of his coat and eyed the older man reflectively.

"Why, nothing at all," he answered quietly.

"You're an impertinent puppy!" gasped Delroy. "You needn't look for a scrap of consideration from me!"

"You can't very well deprive me of what I haven't asked for, or expected from you," returned Jerry. "I am vacating your property at once, and there is nothing more between us."

"There is this between us," snapped Delroy. "I have found you conferring confidentially with my daughter, on obviously intimate terms, and I forbid you to meet her again. She is a young girl, entirely subject to my authority, and she will be directed by me to ignore you absolutely in future. I do not pose as the stern, tyrannical parent, but I cannot afford to have my daughter on friendly terms with an eccentric, outlandish sort of a fellow like you—a comic-supplement clown, whom no one would speak of without smiling!"

Jerry dismissed the insult with a wave of the hand.

"*Comedy* refuses to indulge in brawls with *tragedy*," he said. "If you were a more agreeable companion, Mr. Delroy, I might go into a philosophical discussion with you, but I will say only that I don't agree with the ancient standards of relations between parent and child. Miss Delroy is a free agent, and is for her to say whether she shall recognize me or ignore me. If it pleases her to speak to me again, my comedy rôle will not carry me so far as to tell her that I must obey your command and treat her as a stranger."

He smiled ironically and gave a whimsical shrug as he finished.

Delroy realized that he was being baited and that he had laid himself open to that form of attack.

"You are an insufferable cad," he cried savagely.

"Have it as you will," replied Hampton blandly. "I wouldn't deny you the right to freedom of expression.

"You haven't nerve enough to resent an insult!" muttered Delroy.

"You are wrong there!" Hampton declared quickly. "The point is, that I *have* nerve enough *not* to resent certain forms of insult. You are in a distinctly abnormal mental state now, due to ungovernable temper. With that condition I have to consider your age and your free indulgence of an utterly undisciplined mind. I might as reasonably object to a man's sneezing when he had the influenza, you see. On the other hand, if you come to me, Mr. Delroy, when you are calm and relatively in possession of your faculties, and tell me that you think me an insufferable cad, I will show you all the active resentment that the case may merit."

A verbal thunderbolt trembled on Delroy's lips, but his rage choked him. He was silent for a moment, then he turned abruptly to walk away.

"The house wreckers will be at work tomorrow morning," he croaked huskily, without looking at Jerry again, "and there will be men to begin grading the land. Your truck and all of your menagerie must be off the place to-night!"

Jerry made no reply. He stood under the ancient council tree and watched the man stalk away through the woods. He felt, vaguely, that the honors of the skirmish had fallen to him, but he shrank from thoughts of the aftermath.

CHAPTER V.

RUBBING THE LAMP.

IT was one hour after noon when Jerry walked slowly through the door in the fence. The big buff rooster flapped his wings and crowed arrogantly. The little cow, now tethered in a shady corner of the enclosure, chewed her cud and contemplated her surroundings with serene complacency.

Denny, "the man with the hoe," sat comfortably under the low-spreading branches of an apple tree and rested.

"Two weeks more, Mr. Hampton," he called out cheerily, "an' I'll be havin' radishes out o' the ground for yer."

Jerry nodded, but a lump rose in his throat and he could not speak. He saw Exmoor sitting on the narrow porch, smoking a pipe which he had found in the house, and he managed a doubtful smile as the guest rose to greet him.

"I have had a very comfortable rural morning," said Exmoor genially. "I have been permitted to feed the chickens, carry water for the amiable cow, and even discuss horticulture with your man. I hope you have had no less agreeable and profitable a morning."

Jerry's face answered for him, and Exmoor became gravely serious at once.

"Something has happened, I can see that," he said kindly, "but don't feel that you must tell me about it. All I care to know is, if I can help you in any way."

Jerry shook his head.

"No," he said slowly, "I don't think any one could help me. Thank you, just the same. I'm putting off, from minute to minute, the most unwelcome task that I ever had to perform. I have to tell my grandmother, with very little time to be tactful about it, that we must pack up our things and move to another place. I think I should set about a murder with no more dread."

Exmoor groaned in sympathy.

"Good lord!" he exclaimed, "what a beastly shame! I don't want to intrude, but can I possibly help you to explain the thing to her? Can't we figure out something like a plausible story? If you could tell her about it to-morrow, we might spend the night in working up a brand-new illusion for her."

"It seems incredible and impossible," Jerry answered miserably, "but we have to move to-day—home, farm, everything!"

"You don't mean it!" Exmoor gasped. "Why, that's impossible, man! No one could force you to such an outrageous thing. You can appeal to the law and get some sort of consideration and protection, if—"

"The law doesn't enter into this case," Jerry broke in. "I don't know how it can be done, but I intend to vacate the premises to-night, by hook or crook. I had my first quarrel with my landlord this morning, and I want it to be the last. He ordered me to get out to-night, and I would not gratify him so much as to fail to do so, or come in conflict with him again through any legal bickering."

"I understand perfectly," Exmoor assured him. "I am enough like you in temperament to see clearly that you have to be away from here to-night. It takes a subtle mind, Mr. Hampton, to know that simple compliance is sometimes a strong weapon against an enemy."

Mrs. Hampton came suddenly to the door.

"Don't you men ever think of eating?" she asked with kindly sarcasm. "Mr. Tarleton needs good food to bring back his strength, and I've spent the morning cooking for him, but here you would stand and talk till sundown if I didn't say anything."

"We're coming this minute," answered Jerry, trying to hide his melancholy with a smile.

Exmoor caught his arm as he started toward the door.

"Don't tell her yet," he whispered earnestly; "I want to talk with you five minutes more at least, if you don't mind."

Jerry was mystified, but he agreed, and they joined the old lady at the table. To save Jerry's countenance, the guest started a lively conversation with the hostess and held her attention. Jerry ate in silence and reviewed in his mind the events of the past twenty-four hours with perplexity.

The mystery of Exmoor was beyond conjecture. He had been canoeing on the Hudson, in sporting flannels, apparently a man of elegant leisure, yet men in the Middle West were hunting for him, and Milton Delroy wanted him particularly. Jerry would have considered the chance of a coincidence of names, but Exmoor had first roused his grave suspicions by the consternation he had betrayed at hearing Miss Delroy's name, and that had happened after he had tried to swear his rescuer to secrecy regarding everything that concerned him. If he had been Delroy's agent in the West, as Eugenia had asserted, and was now "missing," and desperately wanted by Delroy, the logical assumption was that he had embezzled funds, or committed some similar breach of the criminal code.

But Jerry could not feel anything but a cordial liking for the man, even in the face of such grave suspicions. He was evasive at times in casual conversation, and he had made only the most perfunctory show of excusing his behavior, but there was nothing of the hang-dog air of the criminal about him.

It was entirely possible that he might be the son or brother of the man so earnestly sought by Delroy, but there would still be left the mystery surrounding his recent actions.

Jerry gave it up. He had no wish to harbor a malefactor, but no more did he desire, in view of late events, to give any assistance to Milton Delroy, whatever the merits of the case might be. All in all, it was not a bad idea to let other people juggle with their own mysteries; his personal troubles were quite enough to occupy his mind for a season.

"That was a bully good pipe I discovered up-stairs this morning," Exmoor remarked cheerfully, as he finished the luncheon and leaned back with a sigh of satisfaction. "If you don't mind, I'll go out and light up again."

"You have full permisison to smoke right here at the table," said the old lady graciously. "Smoking is one vice that can be tolerated."

"But I think I will smoke, too," Jerry said hastily, "so it will be better to go outside. We should fill your house with the fumes, grandmother."

She insisted upon their remaining at table, but Jerry affected a jocular humor and hustled the guest out of doors with a play of banter and merriment.

The two men lost all semblance of jocund humor as soon as they were clear of the house.

"It's two o'clock," remarked Jerry tensely.

Exmoor did not reply, but lighted his pipe thoughtfully.

"I have tried not to appear inquisitive," he said slowly, "but putting this and that together I have made a guess that Milton Delroy is your landlord. Am I right? You needn't answer, you know, if you object to the question."

"There's no secret about it; he is my landlord," was the answer.

"I am acquainted with Milton Delroy," announced the other dryly.

"I had gathered as much," said Jerry frankly. "I may as well tell you now that I learned this morning that Delroy is searching for you. I didn't learn why, and I am not asking the reason."

"Yes, he is searching for me," assented Exmoor, rather coolly. "If you won't think it too strange, Hampton, I will omit the explanation."

"Please let it go at that," returned Jerry. "I certainly wouldn't help him to find you."

"I believe that; I feel perfectly secure

as your guest!" Exmoor declared. "But now, back to your affair, if you don't mind. I don't think you will need to break the news to your grandmother, and I don't think you will have to strike camp to-night. I am vain enough to feel that I have a sort of key to the situation."

Jerry's face lighted up with a great flash of hope, but a cloud fell across it an instant later.

"I couldn't accept any favor from Delroy!" he asserted emphatically.

"I know that," was the reply. "Suppose I adjusted matters in such a way that you would not be disturbed here, now or later, and assured you that the action placed you under no obligation either to me or to Milton Delroy; also that it could in no manner affect your honor; would you be willing to take my word for it?"

Jerry regarded him narrowly, with searching eyes.

"Yes," he said, after a moment, "I will take your word for it."

"Thank you!" Exmoor returned earnestly. "Now—"

Jerry checked him with a gesture.

"Just a moment," he said, "if you'll pardon me. I want to know if you are paying money out of your own pocket to bring this thing about, just because you feel that you are in my debt for what I did last night. If that's the case, it's entirely out of the question."

"I can assure you that I am not parting with a cent!" Exmoor declared. "I happen to be without funds, and I cannot reach any in the immediate future. I had a little money in my wallet, but that is now out of circulation, except at the pleasure of the Hudson River currents. I have to ask you next, if you have any money available."

"About thirty-five dollars," Jerry answered frankly.

"More than enough!" cried the other exultantly. "Now, Hampton, will you hurry down-town and take the four o'clock train for Philadelphia?"

"Philadelphia!" gasped Jerry, in blank amazement.

"Philadelphia!" echoed Exmoor. "When you arrive there, I want you to send a telegram to Milton Delroy from the Broad Street Station. Then you may take the first train back, and the sooner you return the better I shall like it. If all this doesn't tax your patience too severely, I wish you would take it without a word of explanation."

"But what message am I to send him?" inquired Jerry, utterly bewildered.

"And why Philadelphia?" chanted Exmoor, voicing the other's thoughts. "I will give you the message that I want you to send, and, for one of my personal reasons, I want Delroy to wonder for a while if I am in Philadelphia. I am sending you there to do the trick simply because I want to be here. If things should go amiss, I think I could be of some use right on the spot, although it would interfere seriously with my personal plans. If, on the other hand, I went over there, and you were here alone, we should be practically helpless."

"He may not get the telegram to-night," suggested Hampton, with sudden misgivings. "They are delayed sometimes, and it might happen that Delroy would be out of town this evening."

"Don't let it worry you," said Exmoor. "I shall be on guard here, and Milton Delroy will have to eliminate me from the game before he gets through the gate."

Hampton stepped forward suddenly and grasped the other's hand.

"Tell me what to do, and I'll do it to the letter," he said solemnly. "If you gave me Aladdin's lamp and told me to depend on the genie for help, I couldn't be more bewildered or curious, but I feel bound to trust you, Exmoor, and I am asking no more questions."

The man returned his grip heartily.

"I can't foresee any regrets for you, Hampton," he said. "You'll have to hurry now. Tell your grandmother that you are going down-town on an errand for me, and don't know when you will return; it may be late. When you are ready to leave, I'll have the message for you."

Jerry darted into the house, and in ten minutes was back again, dressed in plain, dark clothes, eminently suitable for traveling inconspicuously. He found Exmoor writing on a slip of paper, and consulting a small note-book from time to time.

"There, I think that will do," said the man, and handed him the paper.

Jerry scanned it, and read with an air of ludicrous helplessness:

MILTON DELROY,
Inwood-on-Hudson, New York City.
J. Hampton-8-17-20-11. 131-87-5-213-3-67-9-78-24-16-371-737. 33-411-43-16-20-381-16-14-3-967-9-388-19-134-887. 70-29-7-54-817-93-63-52-20-92-39.
(Signed) IRVING EXMOOR.

"That is an arbitrary code," explained Exmoor, "very hard to decipher without the key, but perfectly comprehensible to Delroy. Have as pleasant a trip as you can, Hampton, and lose no time in getting back."

Jerry wrung his hand again, with fervent, confident gratitude, and ran out at the gate. He did not stop running until he was in the One Hundred and Ninety-First Street station of the subway, and a moment later he was speeding down-town in an express train. The scrap of paper, with its cryptic numbers, did not leave his hand; he clutched it as though it were indeed a talisman.

Exmoor passed the rest of the afternoon in cementing his bond of friendship with Denny, the gardener. His interest in horticulture grew by leaps and bounds, and he gained a compendious knowledge of planting and cultivation, soils, fertilizers and the harvesting and marketing of crops of various kinds.

By sunset, Denny, who "went home nights," was easily prevailed on to spend the evening at the farm, and he agreed to keep an eye on the gate, to receive any possible visitors, and to turn such callers back, by force if necessary, after taking their messages if they desired to leave any.

Exmoor, with rare diplomacy, caused the man to build up for himself an idea that Hampton was engaged in an enterprise of some moment which required careful handling and the strictest secrecy. Exmoor himself was connected with the enterprise, and for private reasons it was expedient that his presence at the farm should remain under the cloak of absolute secrecy.

Denny wagged his rufous-thatched head sapiently as he assured his new friend of his comprehensive grasp of the situation. He convinced "Mr. Tarleton" for the tenth time of his devotion to Jerry Hampton, and declared that he would be on guard both day and night if it would further the ends of the matter in hand.

Exmoor, confident of the fidelity of his henchman, took the evening meal in company with the old lady, and remained cautiously indoors. She was politely glad that Jerry had the chance to be of service to the guest, but obviously worried over the matter of her grandson's supper. They agreed upon a supplementary meal to be served at whatever time Jerry might return.

An automobile stopped at the door in the fence about eight o'clock, and the Delroys' chauffeur sauntered airily into the enclosure. Denny halted him with the authority of a grenadier of the guard, and demanded his business.

"I've a note for Mr. Hampton," said the man, and made as if to brush the human obstruction aside.

Denny caught him by the arm, and the grasp of his huge hand carried conviction.

"Mr. Hampton just happens to be out at th' moment," he said coldly, "so ye'll leave the note with me, me lad."

"I'll give it to old Mrs. Hampton," said the chauffeur, starting forward again.

"I've already told ye what ye'll do!" exclaimed Denny with firmness. "Miss Hampton mebbe happens ter be takin' her pos'-pranjial beauty sleep, an' she carries on outrajus if she's woke up of a sudden. I'm the gentleman in charge, an' I'll take the little billy-doo."

The chauffeur deliberated a moment, then reluctantly surrendered the sealed envelope that he held in his hand. He looked

Denny over with amused contempt, but decided on a diplomatic course.

"Where did young Hampton go to?" he inquired, assuming an easy indifference as he lighted a cigarette.

"Mr. Hampton went out that gate," Denny replied crisply. "It's not my business to look beyond that, nor yours to be askin' impartinent questions, me friend."

The other scowled, but brightened again and asked shrewdly: "Did a man come here to see Hampton to-day? Mr. Delroy told me to ask. He sent a man here on business, he said."

"There's been no man here," answered Denny, "but Mr. Delroy should be askin' his own questions, or hirin' a lawyer to do it for 'im. I regret the necessity, young man, of requestin' ye to remove yer cigarette an' yer accompanyin' face outside th' fence. We have real Orpin'ton fowls here, an' they've delicate voices, an' smoke is bad for their throats. The rooster coughed but a moment ago, an' I'll be after sprayin' his throat, so I'll say good-night to ye."

"You're a funny old geezer!" observed the chauffeur. "Why don't you hire a hall? You ought to be doing the two-a-day on the Loew circuit."

"Sure, I'm considerin' an offer to appear in 'Hamlet' at the Wadsworth," retorted Denny. "It's the part o' the *Second Grave Digger* I'm after takin', an' if ye'll come along, me lad, ye'll do fine, just as ye are, fer *Yorick's* skull."

The chauffeur swaggered through the door and his car went chugging away at a feverish pace a moment later. Denny chuckled with vast satisfaction and carried the note to Exmoor, who was waiting in the dense shadow of the porch.

"This is addressed to Mr. Hampton," Exmoor explained considerately, "but it is understood that I may open it for him."

"That's for you to say, sir, seein' you're a gentleman an' a friend of Mr. Hampton," said Denny, and went back to his station near the gate.

A little after ten o'clock Jerry came home. Exmoor stopped him on the porch, and they read the note together by the light of matches.

> MR. HAMPTON:
>
> Unexpected developments have altered my plans concerning the property you now occupy. I think that if we can have a brief talk we may arrive at an agreement which will be satisfactory to both of us. If you care to call at my house to-night, I will see you at any hour, however late, as I would like to have the matter settled without delay.
>
> (Signed) MILTON DELROY.

Jerry clapped a hand boisterously upon Exmoor's shoulder and burst into a shrill laugh, more of pent-up emotion than of mirth.

"Aladdin's lamp couldn't have done better than that!" he cried.

"And you're going there to-night?" Exmoor whispered anxiously.

"If Broadway was a raging torrent, and five times as wide as it is," answered Jerry, "I would get there to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

A FIFTH OF A LOAF.

ELEVEN o'clock is a late hour in the secluded Inwood section, and as Jerry Hampton hurried from Prescott Avenue into the tortuous lanes of the more thickly wooded part of the hill, the watch dogs were barking vigilantly in the gardens of the darkened houses and there were no pedestrians abroad.

In the Delroy dwelling, however, a shaded lamp glowed dully from the library window at the right of the entrance porch.

Jerry touched the bell lightly and the door was opened almost instantly by Milton Delroy. It had been but a few hours since the two men faced each other with flashing eyes and bitter tongues, and Delroy had sufficient good taste to maintain an icy reserve now, despite the mild, almost conciliatory tone he had employed in the letter delivered by the chauffeur.

No greeting passed between host and visitor.

"Will you step into the library?" said the former, in a colorless voice; and Jerry bowed slightly and complied with the request.

There were bookcases on two sides of the room, which was somber and not unimpressive in its furnishings and decoration, and a large flat-topped desk stood in the center of the floor, with the shaded lamp upon it. Delroy waved Jerry to a chair on one side of the desk and took one on the opposite side for himself.

Hampton was prepared for an opening attack of questions and violent protests, but the man remained oppressively calm and cold.

"My motion-picture promoter has withdrawn his offer and abandoned his project," he said, as easily as though both of them did not know that the statement was a bald fabrication. "I want to ask you, Hampton, if you would care to retain possession of the property if I should revoke my notice to you to vacate it; the terms and conditions to remain as they have been in the past."

Jerry returned the man's supercilious stare and betrayed neither excitement nor elation.

"For myself, I feel rather indifferent about it," he replied, "but because my grandmother is devoted to the place and has certain illusions about it, as you know, I should be glad to keep it on such terms."

Delroy raised his hands from the arms of his chair, joined the tips of his long, bony fingers, and rested his chin upon them reflectively.

"Hampton," he said evenly, after a long pause, "for a dreamer and a student, for a man who maintains a pose of idealism and unworldliness, you are singularly disingenuous."

Hampton smiled ironically.

"Coals to Newcastle are inevitably unwelcome," he returned. "If it will help you to present whatever you have on your mind, Mr. Delroy, we will assume that I am disingenuous. What have you to say to me?"

"How did you do it?" Delroy asked, speaking in a peculiarly calm and matter-of-fact way.

The question and the man's manner were so uncharacteristic and unexpected that Jerry was for a moment out of countenance. He saved himself, however, by attempting no immediate reply. Delroy watched him intently and waited patiently.

"I can truthfully say that I don't know," came the answer, at last.

Delroy scowled with vexation. It seemed to be the last reply that he had expected or desired, but, to Jerry's utter surprise, he forthwith abandoned that line of attack.

Jerry had counted upon, and dreaded, a cross-examination in regard to Exmoor, and he had prepared himself for the distasteful necessity of lying prodigiously, of declaring that he knew nothing of Exmoor or of his movements. Otherwise he could not keep faith with the mysterious man who had befriended him so marvelously.

Therefore, every moment that passed and brought no reference to Exmoor increased his bewilderment.

Delroy began over again.

"You are learning now, Hampton," he said with a return to his bland manner, "how very difficult it is to live the consistent life. I have heard you say more or less, on various occasions, about lofty ideals and strong principles. You have affected a rather conspicuous dignity and pride—a tendency strangely peculiar to impecunious fellows — yet you do not scruple to accept a sort of charity, as it were, from me, although you have shown me little respect or consideration."

"Charity!" cried Jerry angrily. "I am not—"

Delroy interrupted him with an abrupt gesture of deprecation; he seemed unaccountably alarmed.

"I beg your pardon, Hampton," he said almost meekly; "I will take back the word 'charity,' by your leave. I spoke too hastily. What I mean is this: I believe you are too moral a man to sneak up behind me and pick my pocket of eighty dollars

once a month, yet you are perfectly willing to let me rent my property to you for twenty dollars when you know that I could receive a hundred for it."

"The proposition was yours," returned Jerry sharply. "I should not be here if you had not sent for me. But we will end the matter now. I heard your offer and accepted it, and now you seem to accuse me, in a roundabout way, of a sort of extortion. Allow me to reconsider the offer, if you please, and I will refuse it. I will vacate the property, Mr. Delroy."

The conference was a symposium of staggering surprises. Instead of showing relief and satisfaction, as Jerry expected, Delroy became unmistakably alarmed.

"My dear Hampton!" he cried, getting to his feet and leaning over the table, "I don't want you to do any such thing. I have the misfortune to make myself misunderstood all the time. I shall be glad to have you keep the property, as I said. The moving-picture man has withdrawn his offer, as I told you, and I do not know that I should be likely to receive a similar one. If you moved away you would leave me without a tenant, and—and a fifth of a loaf is better than none, to be sure.

"You keep the place in excellent condition; you have made it, as a matter of fact, almost a show place. If I should rent it again, as it stands, my tenant would doubtless be some undesirable person who would turn it into a junk yard or something of that sort. I wouldn't dream of increasing your rent, either; as a farm, the place cannot possibly yield much of an income, and you are paying all that it is worth to you, I am sure."

He sat down again, almost breathless.

"Let us forget any unpleasantness that has passed between us," he went on ingratiatingly, "and let things continue exactly as they have done in the past."

Jerry felt a smile trembling on his lips, but repressed it.

"I would not dream of remaining there, Mr. Delroy," he said, "were it not for my grandmother. She would be wretchedly unhappy, and I doubt if she would live long if we had to give up the farm; it is her life, you know. That is why I am acting in direct opposition to my will. Some men consider it right and imperative, I know, to sacrifice sentiment, family, comfort and everything to their pride, but I can't draw the line so finely. If it came to a test, I think that I should give up my life or my liberty for the sake of my grandmother, so why shouldn't I sacrifice my personal pride just as readily?"

"She is a charming and lovable old lady," Delroy remarked pleasantly, "and your devotion to her is creditable, I'm sure. No, I don't think any reasonable man could blame you for your attitude. I am sorry, on the whole, that you regard a—a compromise with me as a sacrifice of pride, Hampton. We don't like to accept concessions or favors from our enemies, I know, but I am grieved that circumstances have made it appear that there is anything save good will between us."

"I don't regard you as an enemy!" Jerry exclaimed abruptly. "We were certainly not on a friendly footing yesterday, and we exchanged some rather unflattering opinions of each other, but the word 'enemy' is a strong one; superlatives should be reserved for occasions that require them. I don't think that men become enemies over trifling affairs of temper. After that episode in the woods yesterday I looked upon you as an unreasonable and irritating man; nothing more!"

Delroy listened attentively, and his demeanor underwent another surprising change. He leaned on the desk and bent a searching, eager gaze upon the speaker.

"Then you don't regard me as an enemy, Hampton?" he said quietly, after a pause.

"No, I do not," Jerry answered. "Neither could I reasonably look upon you as a friend. Our relations are strictly in the nature of business, I should say, and neither extremity of sentiment is required. We are landlord and tenant, that's all!"

Delroy sat back in his chair and the deeper lines of his face were smoothed out for the first time since the beginning of the interview.

"I am afraid," he said calmly, "that you and I are both too high-strung to get along well together. Some call me phlegmatic, but they do not know me. I once thought that you were almost saturnine, but it seems that I did not know you. The 'live wires' in this world will not bear crossing, you see; there's a 'short circuit' at once, and a 'blow-out.' But seriously, Hampton, I'm genuinely glad to hear you say that you don't regard me as an enemy!"

Hampton bowed slightly, visibly embarrassed by the other's display of such uncharacteristic emotion.

"We need friends," Delroy continued; "more than anything else, I should say. And if we are so unhappily constituted that we are denied friendships, we must at least avoid having enemies. The middle course is quite bad enough for a man who is not an ogre."

Jerry was speculating upon how long this introspective mood was likely to last, when the absolute stillness within and without the house was intruded upon by the stertorous respiration of a motor-car. The sound ceased abruptly, giving place to the clanking of gears and brakes, and that was followed by a low murmur of voices.

Delroy got up quickly and drew the portières together at the library door.

"My daughter!" he explained casually. "She has been at the theatre this evening, down-town."

The outer door opened and closed, and the two men in the library were silent, waiting for the young girl to go up-stairs and out of earshot.

It was directly apparent, however, that she had an escort. Jerry could hear her clear, nicely enunciated tones, lowered to a murmur, and with them the subdued voice of a man, guttural and apparently slovenly in diction.

Delroy indicated with a gesture that silence should be maintained until the conversation in the hall ended, and Jerry acquiesced, but the older man leaned forward in his chair and frowned vexatiously as the unseen escort raised his voice in idle pleasantries and banter, and seemed in no hurry to take his leave.

Eugenia's voice, however, remained subdued, and it was evident that she was gently urging the man to go.

All at once there was a chortling, throaty laugh from the man, a shuffling of feet, and unmistakable sounds of a slight scuffle.

It ceased as abruptly as it had begun, but it was followed by the girl's voice, low but determined.

"I asked you to go," she said, "and now you shall go! You are rude and—intolerable!"

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed the man jovially, and for the first time Jerry recognized signs of intoxication in the voice.

Delroy flushed darkly and was out of his chair and at the curtains in a flash.

"Eugenia!" he said tensely, "it's very late. Please go to your room."

The man was evidently not embarrassed.

"Hello!" he cried heartily; "didn't know you were still up, Delroy. Say! I thought we'd had a pretty good sort of a time down-town—show, supper 'n' everything, but Eugenia's as cross as a bear. 'Taint right, is it, Delroy? Good night, Eugenia!" he added, as Jerry heard the girl going up the stairs, but she did not answer.

"I told you," said Delroy, standing between the curtains, "not to take Eugenia to a restaurant. It's indiscreet enough for her to be seen at the theater unchaperoned, though the custom is not strictly observed nowadays. I said, you remember, that if you must have supper, it could be served here on your return."

"Oh, now I say, Delroy!" protested the man, with heavy good humor, "you lay it on a bit thick, you know! I nev' know whether you're joshing or serious."

He launched himself at Delroy, evidently with the intention of giving him a friendly embrace, but he miscalculated the direction and fairly tumbled through the curtains into the room.

Jerry sprang up instinctively and caught

him as he would have fallen at full length on the floor.

"You're a gentleman, sir!" declared the fellow heartily. "Friend of Delroy? All right, friend o' mine, then!"

Delroy strove to keep his countenance, but an angry red flamed in his cheeks.

"Mr. Foxford, Mr. Hampton," he said stiffly.

"How do you do, Mr. Foxford," Jerry murmured coldly, and was visibly irritated when the man forced him to shake hands.

"Mr. Hampton!" exclaimed Foxford, "it's a pleasure t'know you! Proud of it, sir, I 'ssure you! Oh, I say—Hampton? Hampton? I knew I'd heard that before. Say! ain't you the queer Johnny that keeps chickens an' grows turnips over in the heights?"

Jerry was taken aback. The man was not drunk, in the general sense, but his tipsyness seemed sufficient to mitigate the impertinence.

"I think you have placed me correctly," returned Jerry quietly.

"And now I must ask you to say good-night and leave us, Foxford," Delroy broke in sternly. "Mr. Hampton and I have a business matter to discuss, and it won't wait for mere social chatter. Some other time, you know."

Foxford winked slyly at Hampton.

"Delroy's all for business, Mr. Hampton," he chuckled. "You take my advice, Mr. Hampton: you look out for 'im! He's a wise guy, believe me! If you go selling him any chickens, you stick out for your price. If you can put one over on 'im, you let me know, an' the drinks'll be on me!"

"Good-night, Foxford," repeated Delroy. He seized the man by the shoulders and propelled him forcibly into the hall and through the outer door.

Jerry was gravely disturbed. The man, in his present condition, was a foolish clown, a harmless nuisance, among men; but that Eugenia Delroy should have been subjected to the stigma of his society was an outrage. Toward Foxford himself he felt no more resentment than he would have felt toward any vulgar young cub who might have forced himself upon the girl, but for Delroy to permit such an arrangement as the unchaperoned theatre excursion was inexcusable.

Delroy was nervous and ill at ease when he came back and found Jerry with a set, hard expression on his face.

"I must apologize to you, Hampton," he said, rather too flippantly, "for that little farce."

"It isn't necessary," Hampton replied coldly.

"But I was surprised and embarrassed," insisted the other. "Foxford is really a very good fellow; yes, a very good fellow, indeed! I give you my word, I've never seen him in his cups before! He's a bright, well-connected, promising young business man. I believe he rarely drinks. What astonished me and irritated me most was that he should have indulged himself intemperately when in Eugenia's company."

"Yes," agreed Jerry, without concealing a note of irony, "that is the most astonishing part of it."

Delroy sat down and fidgeted with a paper-cutter on the desk.

"I would hate to have you think," he said, "that I am careless about my daughter's associates; that I don't pay proper attention to her protection just as she is entering society, as it were; so I must confide a little secret to you, and ask you to respect the confidence."

Hampton raised his hand in protest.

"Please don't think, Mr. Delroy," he said stiffly, "that I am assuming any attitude of criticism toward your private family affairs. I am merely sorry that I happened to be a witness to—"

"My dear fellow!" Delroy insisted, a bit too unctuously to please the other, "I would make apologies and explanations to any man that chanced to be present, in order to guard against a false impression. I must tell you that, in a general way, Mr. Foxford has my unbounded confidence; so much so, that I shall probably announce the betrothal of my daughter to him before very long."

"Ah, yes!" said Jerry, very softly and calmly; but Delroy did not miss the flash of red that suffused his whole countenance.

"And, if you'll pardon me for reverting to an embarrassing subject," the older man went on, "that is precisely why I gave way to annoyance and temper this morning. It seemed to me that Eugenia was thoughtless and indiscreet in meeting you in such a place, with every appearance of secrecy when she is virtually engaged to another man."

"I see!" murmured Jerry, without spirit.

"She is fond of Foxford, and they've been around together a good deal during the last six months," Delroy continued blithely, "and I believe the match will be a very happy one. She is young, of course, without a full sense of her responsibilities, but she should know better than even to risk the appearance of such a thing as a clandestine meeting with another man."

"She was entirely innocent of any thought of indiscretion, I'm sure," said Jerry mechanically, scarcely realizing what words his lips were forming.

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Delroy airily. "I know now that she considered her father an oppressive tyrant, and went to give you her sympathy, out of her natural goodness of heart. I knew at the time that there was nothing between you, for you are scarcely acquainted."

"Scarcely acquainted!" echoed Hampton stonily.

"And now I feel that we are all upon a plan of better understanding, sir," finished Delroy, with such a sanctimonious air that Jerry was half prepared to hear him add: "Thus endeth the first lesson."

The visitor got up, looking dull and tired. "Good-night, Mr. Delroy," he said.

"Why, if you must go, good-night and pleasant dreams," replied the host jovially; "but when I am having—er—what dear old Dr. Johnson called 'a good talk,' I never know whether it's late or early. Drop in here again, Hampton, when there's no business to bother us. And I'm coming over one of these days and see that farm, by Jove!—and that charming old lady."

"Thank you," Jerry returned, without enthusiasm, and got himself out of the house as expeditiously as possible.

The hush that follows midnight was upon the land when he stood in the street, and the chill vapors were rising from the lower levels, but without thought of time or habit he turned northward, as he had in the morning, and, unconscious of the whimsical coincidence, walked through the woods to the old Indian tree.

There he sat down on the bench to think of—everything, and nothing in particular, as it seemed; and the blackness of the night woods was turning to dusky gray as the opal mists of the dawn floated over the treetops, when he got up and climbed the crooked path to the hill again.

CHAPTER VII.

IT ALL DEPENDS.

EXMOOR had not removed his clothes or allowed his pipe to grow cold the whole night long. He sat in a corner of the porch, smoking hard, when Jerry Hampton slouched through the doorway in the fence.

It was broad day now, and the sun was streaking long shadows across the hilltop and glimmering on the church spires across the Harlem River in the Bronx.

Exmoor leaped from the porch to the ground without touching the steps.

"What's the matter, Hampton?" he demanded, in a hoarse whisper. "Something has gone wrong!"

Jerry went to the steps and sat down.

"From what you saw of her, Exmoor," he said, "in just the few minutes that she was speaking to us—"

"Her!" cried Exmoor, nonplused. *"She!* Why, what in the devil are you talking about, man?"

"I am trying to talk of Miss Delroy," answered Jerry, in an injured tone, "whom you met over there on Broadway when her auto nearly ran us down. Tell me frankly, Exmoor, if you think she is the sort of a girl that would marry a heavy-faced, low-

bred, ill-mannered, tow-headed, red-eyed, booze-guzzling lout. Tell me honestly!"

Exmoor smiled, in spite of his impatience and amazement.

"Who is the gentleman that you describe in such unequivocal terms?" he inquired. "The lady—well, I hope she hasn't refused you, Hampton! I hope that in a frenzy of self-contempt you are not applying all those compound adjectives to yourself!"

Jerry looked up at him resentfully.

"It's no time for joking!" he declared sharply.

"I beg your pardon," said Exmoor, sobering instantly. "No, Hampton, I cannot believe that a lady of such surpassing attractions, such charm of manner, such wit, such grace, such consummate loveliness, could ever bestow a second horrified glance upon a creature one-half as hideous as the one you describe."

Jerry ignored the banter, or was too distracted to perceive it.

"Milton Delroy has just told me," he said, in a voice as hard as chilled steel, "that his daughter is engaged to a fellow whom it was my bad luck to see; and the man is an ass, a cad, an absolute lout, I tell you. Delroy said that she was in love with the beast! In love with him!"

"Delroy just told you?" queried the other, feigning amazement. "Why, you must have spent the night there and had breakfast with him!"

"No," answered Jerry, taking him literally, "I think I left there around midnight; I wasn't there so very long. Great gods! Exmoor! you seem to think I am telling you a joke! It's a damnable tragedy! The man was drunk there tonight when I saw him. The girl had to run away from him. How could a girl like that care anything for a human beast?

"Now, look here!" he added sternly, as he caught a twinkle in the other's eye, "don't misunderstand me, Exmoor. I have only known Miss Delroy a short time; in fact, we are not even really well acquainted. Don't for the world think that I am taking the stand of a jealous rival. That's too absurd, you know. She is a beautiful, gentle, sweet-natured girl, and I am simply horrified to think that such a thing could happen to her, just as any man would be. Understand me, please: my interest in her is purely impersonal."

"Poor chap!" exclaimed Exmoor, wagging his head sorrowfully, "you've had a dreary night of it, haven't you? Sitting on a curbstone somewhere, I suppose, or by the river bank—anywhere to be alone. I understand it all perfectly, Hampton; it's odd, in a way, but men will always do that sort of thing when they have a purely impersonal interest in a girl."

Jerry started up, deeply hurt and incensed and sentenced the other to banishment to a region that is not mentioned in the current gazetteers.

"I apologize, Hampton, most abjectly," said Exmoor contritely. "I am heartless and inconsiderate. But now, if you'll allow me to refer to another matter, may I ask if anything was said, between you and Delroy, about your tenancy of this place? You may remember that we talked about it quite a bit yesterday, and—"

A reluctant, whimsical smile broke slowly through the storm clouds in the younger man's face.

"I suppose it's my turn to apologize, Exmoor," he replied. "Forgive me if I've acted like an ungrateful, thoughtless idiot. You have been up all night, haven't you, waiting for news from me?"

"Why, yes, I have," was the answer, spoken without rancor. "To be frank, I've been rather up in the air with anxiety. I persuaded your grandmother to go to bed, after I explained to her that you were away upon my service. I'm sure that she thinks me a selfish brute for sending you away at all hours.

"When one o'clock came and you were not back I got impatient. At three o'clock I was convinced that there was nothing short of foul play to be reckoned with. Since then I have tried to be resigned to the rulings of Destiny, but I intended to

storm the Delroy stronghold soon after daybreak. However, Hampton, your explanation is satisfactory. A girl, in any case, puts everything in a new light."

"Delroy practically urged me to remain here on the old terms," said Jerry, smiling significantly. "At first we clashed a bit, but when I declared that I would not stay here the man seemed positively terrified."

"Ah!" Exmoor exclaimed, with evident understanding, but said no more.

"We fenced for a while, talking in circles," Jerry continued, "but what astonished me most was that he didn't once mention the telegram from Philadelphia, or you. The nearest he came to a leading question was when he asked bluntly: 'How did you do it?' I answered just as bluntly that I didn't know. After that he seemed afraid to press his inquiry any further."

"Naturally!" Exmoor remarked quietly. "I will tell you just this, Hampton: If you knew the code in which that telegram was written, and could translate the message then you would not be astonished at Delroy's peculiar reticence; your astonishment would be for other things. Some time I may be able to relieve your curiosity; I can't tell you any more now."

"I have no right to inquire," protested Jerry. "You have done so much for us here, Exmoor, that I certainly should have no feeling other than gratitude. It's natural, I think, that I should be puzzled, and perhaps a bit uneasy; but the big thing is, that the farm is saved! I hate to think that the man has been coerced into yielding to my wishes, but it eases my conscience to think that he begged me to stay here."

"I wouldn't feel uneasy about it, if I were you," Exmoor advised. "I will admit —it would be idle to deny it—that Delroy was coerced; but I'll give you my word, Hampton, that the circumstances were so peculiar that no injustice, in any sense, was done the man."

Jerry shrugged his shoulders and signified by a gesture that the case was beyond his comprehension.

"It's essentially an Aladdin's-lamp sort of an affair all the way through," he observed. "I want you to know, too, Exmoor, that I appreciate the return you have made for whatever service I rendered you. Of course a man is grateful to any one for saving his life, but I didn't suffer very much in doing it. And unless I understand this affair some time, I shall always feel, in spite of your assurances, that you fixed this matter for me at great sacrifice."

"I can't offer you any more assurances to the contrary," returned the other, "so—well, we'll have to let it go for the future to settle. Meanwhile, I am still at your service, and I still have—let us say, Aladdin's lamp. If I can save the beautiful lady from the many-adjectived beast, tell me how to get about it, and it's as good as done."

Hampton smiled sadly.

"Please forget that, Exmoor, if you can," he replied. "I was raving. It seems that I am still young enough to have romantic brain-storms. But there are some things we haven't any right to butt into, and I suppose that is one of them."

Exmoor placed a hand gently on his shoulder.

"That all depends, my dear fellow," he said, "on how much you really care for the girl."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TELEPHONE IN WAR.

THE two men spent most of the day indoors. Exmoor feared that Milton Delroy might drop in to pay his promised visit to the grandmother, and failing that, it was possible that the nonchalant chauffeur or some other emissary might pass that way on the pretext of delivering a message.

In the evening Exmoor was clothed again in his flannels, which had been restored to smartness by a St. Nicholas Avenue tailor, and Jerry furnished a hat to complete his equipment for walking abroad.

"I'm afraid that I repeatedly show my curiosity," said Jerry, as they sat smoking in the upper room, "but there are a few minor details that keep me thinking. You see, you were apparently out paddling for evening recreation when your canoe failed you, and you certainly had a starting point. It seems as though some one must be anxious about you—at your headquarters, you know, where the rest of your clothes are."

The guest smiled patiently.

"Sorry I can't tell you all about it," he returned, "but—no, there's no one particularly anxious about me. My other clothes are in a certain place, but I have reasons for leaving them there for the present. I have written a letter to my base of supplies, and in a day or two I shall receive what money I need. The letter will come here, addressed to Mr. Tarleton, and I hope you will pardon the liberty I took in making that arrangement. I will call for it."

"You'll call for it!" echoed Jerry. "Where do you expect to be, if that isn't an impertinent question? I didn't know that you were preparing to leave us so soon."

"I have accepted your hospitality rather freely," was the reply, "and it has been a very pleasant experience, but it is time now to be moving on."

"That," remarked Jerry, "is merely false pride. We have just got things in order again and I am enjoying your visit, yet you get on a high horse and talk of moving on. You have given my grandmother uncommon delight, and you have given me the rare chance to talk to my heart's content with an intelligent man. As a favor to us, won't you extend your visit?"

"If I didn't believe you meant it thoroughly, I wouldn't dream of such a thing," returned Exmoor, "but I fear my resolution to go is rather weak. I'm having a mighty good time here, Hampton!"

"Then I wish you would make up your mind to stay until you are actually obliged to be in some other place," said Jerry eagerly. "I confess I have a feeling that I am not all through with Milton Delroy; I don't think that my dealings with him will be confined altogether to the renting of this place. And then, I am naturally certain that you are not through with him by any means, and I don't want to be left out of the operations, Exmoor. If there's a finish, I want to see it; I want to be 'in on it.' "

"For your own sake, I wish you might keep well out of it," Exmoor replied gravely, "but things shape themselves in extraordinary ways. You were the very man, you see, to be sitting on the river bank when I needed you; no other man would have done as well. And immediately our affairs began to run in parallel courses, strangely linked together; I was the one man who could help you in your difficulty. I'm superstitious enough to believe that you are in the game, for better, for worse, Hampton, and all that I could do wouldn't keep you out of it."

"Then we'll bow to the inevitable," said Jerry, "and take what comes. Logically I ought to suspect you of being a criminal, a fugitive from justice, and a number of other sinister things, but I can't do it. I believe that you are a good friend to me, and an honorable man. I don't expect to find you otherwise, no matter what happens."

Exmoor looked up at him with a solemn stare, half surprised, half grateful.

"I think you mean that, too," he said, "and I'm glad you feel that way.

"Now," he added, a moment later, "what do you say to a walk? I would like to explore the neighborhood and get my bearings. As soon as we are away from your gate, my being with you will attract no particular attention; and I don't imagine that Delroy is given to promenading the streets at all hours."

Jerry was amazed.

"But I thought you were keeping absolutely under cover!" he exclaimed.

"I am, and I am not," replied the other. "My chief care is to avoid making myself conspicuous. When we were coming here

from the river I was a conspicuous object, bedraggled and half drowned; an over-solicitous person or a policeman would have stopped at nothing short of an ambulance. I didn't want to be written up in the papers. Then, when I was wearing borrowed clothes I was likely to attract attention. If any one had seen me here yesterday and reported it to Delroy he would have been curious about my identity. Just now, however, I am in disguise."

"What!" cried Jerry, laughing incredulously.

"My flannels and my white shoes make me look like anything but a wanderer," explained Exmoor; "I might have stepped off the tennis court, or out of a Washington Heights apartment a moment ago. This rig makes me look casual, you know; a part of the local atmosphere. My beard is a perfectly good one, growing according to nature's designs, but it's a disguise, for I never wore one before.

"Delroy has never seen me with a beard, and I think he would look at me for some time before he recognized me. After all, if I should be recognized, if Delroy should discover me, it would be no great disaster. It would hamper me somewhat, but it couldn't stop me. So you see, we may as well take a walk."

Jerry agreed a little reluctantly, more mystified than ever, and they passed out to St. Nicholas Avenue and strolled down-town. As they came into the miniature "White Way" of the One Hundred and Eighty-First Street section, where movie theatres, chop-houses, lunch-rooms, chop-suey palaces and confectioners' shops unite in making a brave glare of light, Jerry was for turning aside to the protecting shadows of Audubon or Wadsworth Avenue, but Exmoor would have none of it.

"No, we won't skulk," he said. "When you are over-cautious, it's ten to one that you'll meet your man in a dark alley while you are shunning the open streets. Crowds are a wonderful protection, you know, and there is certainly a crowd here. It looks like another city holiday making."

"It might as well be another city as far as the local life goes," said Hampton. "You know that the subdivisions of New York are not only political and geographical; they are psychological. Manhattan people and Brooklyn people are as different as though they had an ocean between them instead of the East River. But the Washington Heights folks have no Manhattan feeling whatever; they don't regard themselves as Manhattanites or Harlemites. The altitude has isolated them; they are 'on the heights,' and they hold their breath when they are down-town, to save their lungs for the rarefied air of their chosen country."

Exmoor laughed appreciatively.

"You've evidently made a study of your Greater New York," he observed.

"Not at all," protested Jerry; "that's unnecessary. You see it and hear it and feel it. These men go down-town to business, but they hurry home to see the sun set over the Palisades, and their social world is bounded by the Hudson and Harlem rivers and One Hundred and Thirty-Fifth Street. In two or three minutes you can cross Washington Bridge and be in the Bronx, but you might as well have crossed the Gulf of Mexico; you're in a far country. Sometimes a family unaccountably emigrates to the Bronx, but it takes courage to do that; once across the bridge, you are *déclassé*. There are some beautiful districts and garden spots over there, and plenty of charming people, but it's the *Bronx!* They give the word a deprecatory inflection on Washington Heights, in much the same way that the Manhattan resident mumbles 'Brooklyn' under his breath."

They had walked by this time to the plaza at One Hundred and Sixty-Eighth Street, where Broadway and St. Nicholas Avenue suddenly conflict, refuse disdainfully to cross each other, and shoot off at new angles to put as much space between them as the map will permit. At Jerry's suggestion they turned toward the river and sauntered northward again, and he pointed out the spots of historical interest which fairly litter the landscape.

They crossed old Depot Lane, and Jerry mentioned that just below them was the point where the eddies had seized the canoe and inaugurated their adventure.

"It is Fort Washington Point now," he explained, "but it used to be called Jeffrey's Hook, and it was just off there that Washington sank some ships to block the advance of the British fleet."

"I suppose that toy whirlpool varies in violence a good deal, doesn't it?" asked Exmoor. "It's a trick of the tides, I imagine."

Hampton nodded.

"Bad as it must have seemed to you," he answered, "it really doesn't amount to much. You would scarcely notice it in anything heavier than a canoe."

The Arrowhead Inn loomed brightly before them, and Hampton halted and drew the other's attention to the courtyard, with its orderly rows of waiting limousines, touring cars and runabouts.

"If you have no fear of observation in such a glare of light," he said, "we'll go in for a while."

"I'll take the chance," answered Exmoor, and presently they were seated at a secluded table in a corner of the main room.

Jerry ordered cool drinks and some cigars, and they talked quietly and glanced over the crowd of motorists.

Suddenly Exmoor gave a start, and a look of eager interest came into his eyes.

"Don't turn around too abruptly," he whispered, "but an automobile has just left two people at the door—they're coming in now—and I'm sure that the girl is Miss Delroy."

Jerry was instantly alert and uneasy. At a signal from Exmoor that it was safe to venture a look he turned cautiously and saw a man and a girl sitting down at one of the central tables.

He flushed slightly and his lips tightened as he resumed his former position.

"Yes," he said crisply; "Miss Delroy and that — er — Mr. Foxford. Great Heavens! Exmoor, I can't understand it at all! It isn't possible that a girl of her spirit and intelligence could be actually forced to accept the attentions of a fellow like that."

Exmoor from his seat had the other pair in full view.

"Well, I can't say that the lady seems to be undergoing an ordeal," he observed mercilessly. "From the fact that the waiter is taking an order for supper, we may assume that she still has an appetite; and she converses with her escort in a conventional, unruffled manner. I think I should describe the affair as perfectly regular.

"Forgive me if I seem unsympathetic, Hampton, but I have noticed that a good motor-car and a pocket-book that opens automatically when brought near a restaurant or place of amusement go a long way toward making a man endurable to a girl. As a proof of my brutal honesty, I'll venture to disagree with your description of the man. He appears to me a fair type of the average idiot-about-town, but I think that the galaxy of compound adjectives you hurled at him last night were inspired by sincere but extremely acute prejudice."

Jerry shrugged his shoulders and offered no defense.

"Do you think they have seen us yet?" he asked nervously.

"Apparently not," answered the other; "they are entirely absorbed in each other's society. I will issue bulletins from time to time and keep you informed."

"I wish we could get out of the place without being seen," muttered the younger man, thoroughly disgruntled.

"The gentleman," announced Exmoor facetiously, "is as prodigal as a Russian grand duke used to be in Paris. The waiter is placing all of the essentially high-priced delicacies of the season on the table, and I see glasses which were fashioned to hold only champagne."

Hampton made a gesture of profound disgust.

"Cheer up!" exclaimed the watcher a minute later; "the lady has scruples proper to her youth and maidenly dignity;

she declines champagne with adorable firmness, and the gentleman wears the covertly gratified look of one who sees an entire bottle for himself. I will add a footnote: the gentleman appears to have had spirituous refreshment before coming here."

"I've no doubt of that!" grumbled Jerry, with a grimace.

They smoked in silence for a while, then Exmoor leaned forward with his elbows on the table and regarded the other pair intently.

"I fear," he said, less lightly, "that the lady is almost as bored as I am sure you would wish her to be. She has really quite a bit to say to the man, but she's not at all blithe about it. I believe there is nothing more incongruous or comic, Hampton, than the sight of people quarreling in a place of entertainment."

"Quarreling!" gasped Jerry.

"Perhaps I exaggerate," went on the other quickly. "There's nothing to be alarmed about, anyway. No, I am simply noting that the man has brought the girl in considerable state to a place of entertainment, and she is not entertained. The man seems to take it philosophically, however; with the responsibility of a whole bottle resting on him, he has valiantly made away with three glasses already. The waiter will get nothing but the dregs."

Hampton fidgeted.

"I don't see how you can find any humor in it; I'm damned if I do!" he said.

"Humor is as good as rage when you are powerless to act," returned Exmoor. "I'm not altogether heartless, Hampton, but I've saved my own life and my reason two or three times with a timely little dash of humor. If you don't punctuate your groans with a laugh here and there you'll break your heart in two. Believe me, a grin or a chuckle, even if you have to force it, breaks the tension and lets you take a breath."

"What are they doing now?" Jerry demanded abruptly.

"The man is following the logical sequence," was the answer; "after the third glass of champagne comes the fourth, as day follows night. Now he is devoting himself to the traditions of the convivial life; he is trying for the fiftieth time to convince his non-drinking companion that drinking is the only royal road to happiness. The lady couldn't gracefully prevent him from filling her glass, but she won't touch it, you may be sure. Now the man has an inspiration; it has occurred to him that the lady fears a dearth of champagne at their table, so he has ordered another bottle to reassure her."

Hampton clenched his fists with fury.

"Can't we do something?" he demanded. "How can we let an outrage like that go on? I'll admit, Exmoor, that Miss Delroy has brought it on herself; she should have sense enough not to be seen in the company of a fellow like that; but she's very young, and some one ought to protect her."

A chorus of rippling laughter came from a party of four at a nearby table, and Exmoor scowled and bit his lip.

"What is it?" Jerry demanded tensely.

"I'm sorry to say," was the answer, "that others are beginning to share the humor of the situation with me. I missed that particular point, but I think the man upset the lady's glass in his efforts to persuade her. Yes, the waiter has picked it up. Upsetting a glass is always good for a laugh, you know, in the average company.

"Tell me, Hampton," he went on, with a change of tone, "if Miss Delroy should be left alone suddenly without an escort, would you feel at liberty to offer her your services?"

Hampton looked puzzled.

"Why, yes," he said slowly, "of course; I wouldn't sit still and let her face an embarrassing situation alone."

"You know that I happen to be moneyless," Exmoor continued rapidly. "Will you let me have a quarter if you have it about you?"

Wondering vaguely, Jerry drew some small coins from his pocket and handed them across the table.

Exmoor got up.

"I may not be successful," he said softly, "but I'll see what I can do," and with that went quickly out of the room.

Some three minutes later a page glided into the room and circled it.

"Mr. Foxford!" he called in a shrill treble. "Mr. Foxford—Mr. Foxford—"

"Here!" responded Eugenia Delroy's escort, in a voice for all the world to heed.

"Telephone call for you, Mr. Foxford," the boy reported.

The man knitted his brows, possibly wondering how he had been traced to the restaurant, but shrinking from any mental effort, he laid down his napkin and got up.

"Here, boy," he called out gruffly; "here's a half a dollar for yer!"

A titter of merriment went around the tables, and Foxford glanced at some of the people near him and winked ostentatiously, as a token of good comradeship; then he followed the boy a trifle unsteadily out of the room.

Eugenia Delroy's face was a vivid crimson; she lowered her eyes to her lap and sat motionless, wretchedly miserable.

Hampton got up quietly and took Exmoor's vacant seat in order to watch further developments. He was satisfied that the summons to the telephone was a result of some maneuvering on the part of his friend, but he was all at sea as to what might follow.

Nothing did follow directly, except the failure of the man to return. Five, ten minutes passed. The girl was forced to look up through sheer nervousness. The people were staring at her frankly, half sympathetic, half amused.

She glanced toward the outer door, as though seeking an escape, but a timid, helpless expression drew down the corners of her mouth and widened her eyes.

"Damn shame!" exclaimed a well-disposed man in a far corner of the room, and it was the cue for another general laugh.

Eugenia's lips quivered and she twisted her gloves between her hands distractedly. She looked wildly around for some ray of hope, and she saw Jerry Hampton.

He half rose from his chair and bowed to her gravely. She started nervously, parted her lips as though she were about to cry out, then smiled piteously and nodded to him.

Jerry waited for no further encouragement; he was already berating himself for delaying so long; he strode swiftly to her table, with all eyes upon him, and took the hand she held out to him.

In that moment, which was a veritable ordeal for Jerry, the girl recovered something of her self-possession.

"How do you do, Mr. Hampton," she said, loudly enough to furnish evidence to the spectators that she knew him. "I didn't see you here before. I want to go home; will you please take me out of this place?"

Jerry sent a waiter for his hat and walking-stick. He had paid his own score, and there were no delays.

"When the gentleman comes back," he said quietly to Foxford's waiter, "tell him that the lady couldn't stay any longer and that she has gone home with one of her friends."

Eugenia took his arm, and they hurried toward the door. A party of youths, resembling the freshman variety, had the table nearest the door, and one of them looked up with a face full of guileless merriment and sang gaily:

> "Where did you get that girl?
> Oh! you lucky devil!"

Eugenia quailed miserably and clung the tighter to Jerry's arm, and then they saw friendly darkness before them and felt the cool night wind in their faces.

CHAPTER IX.

A BOND OF GRATITUDE.

"I THINK I can find a taxicab here in the yard," said Hampton, as he and the girl paused outside the restaurant.

She lifted a restraining hand and shook her head.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Hampton," she

said tremulously, "I'd much rather walk. I want to breathe cool air and be out of doors."

He assented quietly, and they walked up Haven Avenue without another word between them until road-construction operations forced them to go over to Fort Washington Avenue. As they approached One Hundred and Eighty-First Street the girl's steps lagged perceptibly, and Jerry proposed going down the hill to the cab stand at St. Nicholas Avenue, but she still demurred.

"I am tired—nervously exhausted, I guess," she said wearily, "but I want to keep walking. We'll go on up the hill, if I'm not imposing on your time."

"I'm absolutely at your service, Miss Delroy," Jerry answered stiffly, though it was farthest from his wish that the speech should sound otherwise than gracious.

They went up the Fort Washington hill, and when they came to the marble settle that marked the northeast bastion of the famous Revolutionary fort, Hampton urged her to sit down and rest for a while. She sank down with a sigh of relief, and he paced slowly up and down the walk in front of her, silent and thoughtful.

"You were very good to do this for me," she said, when the silence was becoming oppressive. "I don't know how I could have got along without you."

"I don't deserve any credit for it," protested Jerry. "Mr.—er—that is, a friend of mine managed the whole thing."

"Managed?" she queried. "Managed what? What do you mean?"

Jerry saw, too late, that he was courting disaster in dragging Exmoor into the case, but he could not retreat now.

"It would have been more considerate not to tell you," he said, "but now I shall have to, I suppose. My friend and I saw that you were in an embarrassing situation, and he left the room and—as I believe—got Mr. Foxford out of it by a trick. What he did with him after that, I don't know. I should have offered my services sooner, but I hesitated to present myself so abruptly, and unbidden."

"Then there was no telephone call for Mr. Foxford?" Eugenia asked.

"Not unless my friend was telephoning from across the street," said Jerry. "He didn't have time to go far."

She sighed faintly and was silent again.

"Mr. Hampton," she began rather coldly, "you overheard something of what happened last night when I got home from the theatre, didn't you?"

"Yes," Jerry answered bluntly, finding it impossible to be tactful in his perplexity.

"Then you must have very little respect for me!" she declared.

He made a gesture of protest.

"Miss Delroy," he said tensely, "there is no one in the world whom I have more respect for! In the first place, I have no right to interest myself in your affairs; but, if I have any feeling in the matter at all—any feeling that I may express—it is, that I don't understand—anything."

"No one could understand, I am sure," she agreed. "But about this awful affair in the restaurant," she added hastily; "was it your friend that I met on Broadway, who wouldn't accept any help from me?"

"Why, yes," Jerry answered reluctantly; "yes, it was."

"Mr. Tarleton! Wasn't that the name?"

"Yes, Tarleton," he said nervously.

"I am very grateful to him," she said solemnly. "Please tell him that."

She arose from the marble settle and took his arm again and they walked northward, past the Libby castle and the Billings château, and the remnant of old Fort Tryon. There were bright lights in the Abbey Inn, and motor-cars standing in the yard, and Jerry felt a shudder from the girl as the scene suggested to her the one that they had left so recently.

He guided her down the serpentine drive toward Broadway, and as he reminded her perfunctorily that they had no great distance farther to go, she spoke again.

"I would like to have you believe that I was not motoring with Mr. Foxford, or having supper with him, with any idea of enjoyment," she said bitterly.

"The reverse would be harder to believe, if I may be frank," was the response, given without reticence of feeling.

"That makes it all the harder to understand why I was with him, doesn't it?" she asked.

"It is always hard to understand such things until you know the circumstances."

"And I can't tell you anything like that," she said regretfully. "I can only say that I was—that something made it impossible for me to refuse his invitation—even after what happened last night."

Jerry was gaining confidence with rising indignation.

"It was only yesterday morning that I said something to you about what I thought of the relations between parent and child," he reminded her. "There were many tyrannical parents and many obedient children in the old days, from what we hear, and they abided by some hard principles. The parent's will, then, was stronger than the laws of the State, apparently.

"But, you see, Miss Delroy, we're living in a vastly different age; if anything, the pendulum has swung too far. The child's will seems to govern the parent in some cases nowadays. But however you may look at it, the child has got to be considered as an individual. A daughter can be obedient and reverential, but when it comes to the shaping of her destiny she is the one to have the first word. A father may advise his daughter and protect her, but he may not dictate the building of her future."

He was excited, grimly enthusiastic, and would have continued, but the girl checked him.

"You have misunderstood me, Mr. Hampton," she said meekly; "the conditions aren't quite as you seem to think they are. My father didn't force me to accept Mr. Foxford's attentions. Really, I don't think he approves of him, any more than any one could. I can't tell you how it came about, but—I might say that I forced myself to do it. The circumstances were what forced me."

"If you'll pardon me," said Jerry gravely, "I don't think that you understand quite how your father does feel about it."

"Did he say anything to you about Mr. Foxford?" she demanded quickly.

"He told me, in your library last night," answered Jerry, hardening his voice, "that you were fond of Mr. Foxford, and that your engagement would be announced shortly."

Eugenia gave a little gasping cry.

"He told me," Jerry went on firmly, "that he did approve of Mr. Foxford, and that he considered him a well-connected, promising young man."

The girl let go his arm and clasped her hands distractedly.

"I can't doubt you, Mr. Hampton," she moaned, "but how could he be as weak and unprincipled as that? There's only one explanation; he was terribly embarrassed because you had witnessed such a scene, and he was trying madly to put it all in what he deemed the best light. But I know how he feels about it; he knows that the man drinks, and that he's ill-bred and a cad, and he's disgusted with him. Instead of admiring the man, he positively—oh, he hates him and fears him!"

"Fears him!" cried Jerry. "Impossible!"

"I have said too much!" she gasped, filled with alarm. "I didn't mean to say that! Don't ask me any more, please; and don't let my father know that I have said anything of the sort."

"Just one more question," Jerry insisted, with grim determination: "Would your father even permit you to stoop to a man like that *because he fears him?* I can't believe that a man of your father's type would grovel before a poor, insignificant weakling under any circumstances."

"Oh, I simply don't know what to say!" she wailed. "Please don't ask me any more. I'm too—too unstrung to talk about it. Some other time, perhaps, we can talk more calmly, when—"

"I know that I have no sort of right to interfere," said Jerry, apologetically, "but some one must interfere. Will you talk to

me again, Miss Delroy? Not next month, or next week, but right away!"

"To-morrow," she answered quickly, with a sigh of relief. "I'll talk to you any time except to-night."

"Would you be willing to meet me again at the place where we talked yesterday?" he asked. "Say, at eight o'clock in the evening?"

"Yes, I'll do that," she promised. "I think that will be better than for you to come to the house. Father will be away—he has a business meeting somewhere down-town in the evening—but even so, I think I'd better see you there where we were yesterday."

Scarcely realizing it, they had climbed the hill and reached the girl's house while they were talking. The customary light was burning in the library. They could see Milton Delroy, through the window, sitting at his desk.

"I suppose I must say good-night and leave you at the door?" said Jerry.

She was thoughtful for a moment, then: "No; I think you'd better come in," she said, to Hampton's surprise. "I certainly shall not lie and say that I came home alone, and I intend to tell my father what has happened this evening. If you'd rather not see him—"

"I'll come in," interrupted Jerry, and walked up the path with her unhesitatingly.

"Hello, there!" Milton Delroy called out cheerily as they entered the hall. "I didn't hear your car outside. Send Foxford in here to me, Eugenia, when you're through with him."

"I was through with him earlier in the evening, father," responded the girl. "He's not here. Mr. Hampton was good enough to bring me home."

They heard a stifled imprecation from the library, either of anger or astonishment, and Delroy bounded through the portières into the hall.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, "what does this mean?"

Then his face relaxed, and he managed a smile, but it was scarcely mirthful.

"Well, well, good-evening, Hampton. I am astonished, but no less glad to see you again. But what's this, Eugenia, about being through with Mr. Foxford?"

The girl stood in the centre of the hall, her hands clasped in front of her, and without pausing, without raising or lowering her voice, told in grim detail the story of her evening of torture and confusion.

Delroy heard her through to the end, then he leaned wearily against the wall and struck his hand upon his forehead.

"It's frightful!" he exclaimed. "Frightful! To think that my daughter—I beg your pardon, Hampton; I mustn't give way to my feelings like this. I have to thank you, sir, for going to the rescue of my little girl; you and your thoughtful, resourceful friend. I should be happy to thank him in person. His name, you said, was—"

"Tarleton," answered Jerry, and unflinchingly met the older man's gaze as it was bent searchingly upon him.

"I'm sorry about Foxford," Delroy resumed; "I had no suspicion that he would in any way repeat last night's offense. It's shocking! The man must be drinking like a fish, or he wouldn't be so careless. I dare say that he'll apologize handsomely to-morrow, but we can't let it go at that. You never feel real confidence again in a man who disappoints you so."

Hampton nodded agreement, with as much irony in his expression as the old man cared to take.

"Good-night, Mr. Hampton," said Eugenia softly, and gave Jerry her hand. "Thank you again, for all you did for me."

Hampton could not trust himself to speak at the moment, but he bowed solemnly, and she nodded to her father and went up the stairs.

"A very wretched affair," observed Delroy heavily.

"Yes," said Jerry dryly.

Delroy looked at him sharply, and with no particular resentment. The elderly man seemed comparatively unabashed by the incongruity of the situation. He was no more inclined to offer an excuse for his

glaring inconsistency and his repeated turn-abouts than a character in a musical comedy plot.

"And now I must be going," Jerry announced.

"Just a cigar, or a bit of refreshment before you go," the other suggested.

"Thank you, but it's getting late," responded Jerry. "I'll say good-night and—"

"You must let us meet your friend Mr. Tarleton," broke in Delroy, and Jerry thought he caught a gleam in his eye.

"Thank you," he returned simply.

"I never heard you speak of him, I think," Delroy went on suavely. "Is he a New Yorker, or is he—perhaps from *Philadelphia?*"

Jerry gave him look for look, and permitted a slight smile to play over his lips.

"No," he answered, "he is not from Philadelphia. He has been a New Yorker as long as I have known him."

"You must be neighborly, Hampton," the other went on cordially, as Jerry moved toward the door. "I feel that we are getting better acquainted. And when you prove yourself such a friend to my daughter, you win my friendship and my undying gratitude. It will bear the test, too, Hampton: if you need a friend, come to me!"

"Thank you," said Jerry again, and smiled with unconcealed amusement as he went out at the door.

CHAPTER X.

A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW.

IT was near midnight when Hampton reached the farm, but Exmoor had not returned. This disturbed him vaguely, for Exmoor had been ill prepared for any extensive adventure; he reflected regretfully that he should have furnished him with more money from his own slender purse.

The night passed, and he sat on the porch and waited, as Exmoor had done for him the previous night. It was possible, he feared, that his guest might not come back. The episode in the restaurant had naturally endangered his incognito; it had made him, in a way, as open to observation and notice as he had shrunk from being; so it was conceivable that he might now disappear as mysteriously as he had appeared.

The sun rose and Jerry sat and smoked, with an anxious eye fixed upon the door in the fence.

"He is at least paying me back in my own coin," he reflected.

At eight o'clock, while the grandmother was rattling pots and pans in the kitchen, unconscious that the men were not in the chamber above, Exmoor walked in.

"Vengeance is sweet!" said Jerry, meeting him on the path to the door.

"I am not vindictive," Exmoor returned, smiling cheerfully. "I have been in the whirl of social life, and it was impossible for me to tear myself away any earlier."

"Is it more mystery?" inquired Hampton, "or have you been dabbling in adventures that you can tell me about?"

"I will be as open as the day!" declared the guest. "Hampton, I have been dabbling in the twentieth century sport of kings—the greatest of New York outdoor sports—I have been joy riding."

Jerry threw up his hands in mock horror.

"You will tell me next," he said, "that you have been cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. Foxford!"

"You've won the guess!" cried Exmoor. "You see, I spoiled Mr. Foxford's evening by treacherously separating him from his charming companion. We talked it over—at very considerable length; that is the penalty the sober man pays for meddling with a drunken man's affairs. I think I began with Mr. Foxford about ten o'clock, and I give you my word at twelve o'clock I was still explaining to him why I objected to his return to the dining-room when he found that the call to the telephone had been a mistake."

"You are a martyr!" exclaimed Hampton. "Couldn't you get away from that man?"

"Oh, but I didn't try," was the answer.

"I listened to him with infinite patience, and even repeated my own speeches a score of times when he evinced appreciation. In an unguarded moment I told him that I believed he was really a good fellow, and it moved him to tears. He had to have repeated assurances after that that I had actually said it. I fancy that no one ever suggested such a flattering thing to him before. We became such fast friends that he accorded me the freedom of the city, and that made it necessary for us to tour the town in a broad, comprehensive way. We touched nearly all the boroughs, I think, and I was introduced to distinguished bartenders, popular head waiters and several policemen."

"As Mr. Tarleton?" queried the listener.

Exmoor nodded.

"As Mr. Tarleton, Mr. Carleton, Mr. Charleston, Mr. Smith, Jones, Brown and during the last stages as 'Old Tarlty!' You'll think me very frivolous, Hampton, but I never like to miss an opportunity to hear wisdom from the mouths of babes and drunkards. By drinking all the mineral water in New York and encouraging Mr. Foxford to acquire a corner in champagne, I learned many things. Out of several hours of gabbling, you can usually sift two or three plain truths from a drunkard's conversation, and I sifted judiciously.

"As an idiot and something of an inebriate, the fellow is not such a bad sort. He is infatuated, for the moment, with Miss Delroy, and his idea of devotion is based on the standard of the New York rounder. She is a puzzle to him; he can't understand a girl who is unimpressed by fifty-dollar suppers and thirty-dollar bouquets of orchids."

Hampton sniffed contemptuously.

"There's something mighty peculiar in the affair," the other resumed, becoming serious; "I don't understand it yet. This fellow is really just a great booby—a simple school-boy spendthrift. He is infatuated, as I said, but the girl's rebuffs have discouraged him, and he is about ready to give up and go looking for buds in other rose gardens. But he seems to be in an extraordinary dilemma, Hampton; he is reluctantly willing to give up the girl because she dislikes him, but he doesn't dare to. It's a case of his being damned if he does and damned if he doesn't!"

"What are you driving at?" exclaimed Jerry.

"Foxford," said Exmoor solemnly, "is in abject fear of Milton Delroy."

Hampton gasped and clasped his head in his hands. "This is the climax!" he cried. "I'm sure of only one thing, Exmoor; either I am stark mad or all you other people are raving maniacs!"

"Why not have it that we're all equally mad?" Exmoor asked, laughing at his blank stupefaction.

"Miss Delroy has confided to me that her father fears Foxford, for some mysterious reason," said Jerry.

"Well, that doesn't prove any one insane, does it?" asked Exmoor. "Fear and hate are synonymous terms. There's nothing extraordinary in a whole portion of hate being divided equally between two people. Why shouldn't fear be shared in the same way?"

"This is a problem that can't be worked out in platitudes!" Jerry declared. "I shall try to find out something tangible about it to-night. Miss Delroy promised to talk with me again when she was less agitated."

"I congratulate you!" exclaimed the other. "You are going to the house?"

"No, I am not. Don't try to build anything romantic out of it, Exmoor; I am simply going to meet Miss Delroy away from her home to hear what she is willing to tell me and to help her if I am able to. I won't go to the house because I cannot abide that man. He is going to be away this evening, for that matter, but his personality obtrudes itself upon the very atmosphere."

"Well, I wish you a pleasant evening," said Exmoor. "If Delroy is to be away on affairs of his own it may prevent him from meddling with yours. Now, I think we should pay our respects to your grandmother and go through the ceremony of

breakfast as decently as possible. After that we should both get some sleep. We haven't bothered about such trivial matters lately, but it's a good thing to sleep an hour or two when you have the time to spare."

They breakfasted leisurely, to the delight of the old lady, and the day passed without event. At seven o'clock in the evening Jerry started for the trysting place, and left Exmoor in his favorite corner of the porch puffing at his favorite pipe.

As he had intended, Jerry reached the clearing by the old council tree half an hour before the appointed time, but it lacked a quarter to eight when Eugenia Delroy appeared suddenly among the dusky shadows of the wooded slope, escorted, as usual, by the Airedale terrier.

Hampton sprang forward to meet her, and she gave him her hand.

"I'm ahead of time, as well as you are," she said, "but I wished that I might come even earlier, while it was still daylight. I'm very nervous; I'm frightened; I don't know how I had the courage to come even this distance alone, through so many dark places. But I knew that you would be here, and that you could hear me if I called out."

"What has happened?" inquired Jerry anxiously. "But that's a stupid question. Enough happened last night to make you nervous, without anything being added to it."

She allowed him to lead her to the bench, but as she sat down she glanced back among the trees apprehensively.

"It's not last night that I'm nervous about," she began, speaking low and timidly; "I have a new worry; I have seen a strange man near our house three times to-day, and there is no doubt in my mind that he was watching the house, or for some one in it."

"Does your father know it? Have you told him?"

She shook her head.

"I wasn't in a mood to talk with him to-day," she explained; "and I could have got no satisfaction or relief from him. He's nervous enough himself, and he would have added to my alarm, if anything. I didn't sleep very much last night —I couldn't, you know—but I stayed in my room all the morning to rest. About noon I took my dog and went out for a walk. The man was standing just a little way from the house, where the road curves, and I was disturbed by the way he looked at me."

"Was he a tramp?" inquired Jerry. "Did he look like a dangerous character?"

"No, he was well dressed—plainly, but well. He might be fifty years old, I think; his hair and beard were slightly gray and his shoulders were a little rounded. I don't know why, but I don't think that I should be half as scared about it if he had been poorly dressed."

"And you saw him three times?"

"He saw me looking at him that first time—though I wasn't alarmed then, of course—and he turned and walked down the hill. There are so few people living on the hill that strangers are conspicuous, but I merely thought that he was one of the chance strollers that find their way up here. Then, about an hour later, I came back from my walk, and there he was again, sauntering along the other street, but looking at our house all the time through the trees. I went in and spoke to Ann, the maid, about it, and she said she had seen him from the kitchen window a dozen times in the last three days.

"I watched for him after that," she continued, "but I didn't see him again until just as it was getting dark. Then, he came through the street back of our house and stopped, and he stood there under a tree and smoked a cigar until it was so dark that I could see only the glow of it. Father had gone down-town then, and I had to start to keep my appointment with you. The maid is going out, too, this evening, so the house will be deserted—"

"Your chauffeur?" queried Jerry.

"Father went down-town in the car," she explained. "I should have stayed at

home to watch the house, but I didn't like the idea of being there alone. Toggles is a good watch-dog, but he couldn't save me from being frightened to death if anything happened. I didn't feel much like coming here alone, either, but I couldn't see the man or his cigar any longer, and I pulled myself together and ran nearly all the way."

"Do you think we had better go back?" Jerry asked gravely. "If you keep much money or jewelry in the house we really ought to take some precaution."

"My jewelry doesn't amount to much," she answered, "but there's the safe in the library; I don't know what's in it, but I think there is always some money and a lot of papers."

"Suppose we walk back there?" Jerry sugested. "You needn't go in, if you're too nervous, but we can keep an eye on the place."

"It's what we should do, of course," she assented, and they got up at once and walked swiftly up the hill.

As they came near the house they could look down to the levels of the valley, and they saw the fiery eyes of a motor-car moving up the Prescott Avenue hill.

"I wonder if that is our car?" Eugenia exclaimed. "I didn't expect father back so soon."

"I don't mind his seeing me, on my own account," Jerry said quickly, "but will it be embarrassing for you if he knows I came here again to-night?"

As Eugenia started to reply a startled gasp came from her parted lips, and she gripped Jerry's arm convulsively with both hands.

"Look!" she cried, and forcibly turned him toward the house. "It's gone now; but I saw a light flash in the library—as though some one struck a match!"

"Wait here; I'll see if anything is wrong," said Jerry, and before she could restrain him he disengaged himself from her hold and ran up the path to the porch.

As his foot touched the top step a shadow loomed out of the denser darkness of the doorway, something struck him sharply in the midriff, and he went over backward and sprawled in the gravel of the path.

The dark figure, which he had seen as in a flash of the eye, leaped over him, and he heard confused sounds of running feet, the approach of a motor-car and a wild scream from the girl.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE OF FRONT.

JERRY'S breath had been driven from his body by the unexpected blow, but he recovered quickly. As he sat up and got, half-dazed, to his feet Toggles, the terrier, came leaping about him, barking excitedly. An instant later Eugenia was at his side and Milton Delroy came panting after her.

"A burglar?" cried Delroy, interrogatively. "Do you think he got into the house?"

"It was the man I saw here to-day!" gasped Eugenia, breathless with fright. "I couldn't mistake him; I saw him as he struck you, and he was the same one!"

"He's got well away, at any rate, thanks to my stupidity," said Jerry, with disgust. "The next thing is to find out if he was in the house or just getting in."

Delroy, now muttering incoherently to himself, produced a key and unlocked the door. As the danger, whatever it was, had passed with the flight of the intruder, all three went in boldly.

Delroy snapped on the hall lights and glanced quickly around him.

"Nothing wrong here," he said, with relief; "but we'd better have a look at the library."

Jerry caught the edge of the drawn portière, to hold it aside, and Delroy started to lead the way. As he crossed the threshold there came the sound of movement within the dark room, then a stunning crash of glass.

The two men sprang forward shouting, and Delroy whirled like a flash to the wall and switched on the library lamps.

With the sudden glare of light came another shattering of glass, and they saw a man hurl a chair through the tall casement window, stripping it of both sash and panes, and leap after it into the darkness of the garden.

At the same instant Delroy whipped a revolver from the pocket of his overcoat, flew to the window and fired three shots after the fugitive.

Jerry Hampton saw Eugenia in the doorway, white-faced and swaying on the verge of a swoon, and he caught her in his arms as she fell forward.

"Miss Delroy has fainted," he said hoarsely to the father, as the latter turned away from the window.

Jerry's own face was well-nigh as white as the girl's, but from a cause remote from terror.

Harry, the chauffeur, darted in from the porch, wild-eyed, begging to be told what had happened.

"Don't stand there gawking, you fool!" roared Delroy, purple with rage. "The house has been raided, and two men have got away. Why aren't you chasing them? Why haven't you got a policeman? Where were you all the time, anyway?"

Harry darted out again, and Delroy controlled himself long enough to run for a glass of water for the girl. Jerry placed her gently on a couch in the hall and she revived quickly.

Delroy was back in the library investigating the burglary.

"Did he get anything?" Jerry inquired, with a peculiar lack of spirit, as he and Eugenia stepped again to the door.

"It wasn't his fault if he didn't!" snapped the man of the house. "He evidently had all the tools of his trade and used them."

The two young people drew nearer to the desk behind which Delroy was stooping, and Jerry saw, with widening eyes, a small safe with its door blasted off, and a litter of rugs and blankets that had been wrapped about it to muffle the explosion.

Delroy jerked a small drawer from one of the compartments of the safe, and several packets of bank notes fell from it to the carpet.

"He didn't have time to get the money!" exclaimed Eugenia joyously.

Her father lifted a portion of the interior framework from its place and revealed a hidden compartment at the rear. He thrust his hand into a deep metal tray, groped excitedly for an instant, then sprang erect and reeled drunkenly against the desk.

"Good God!" he cried harshly, and as he attempted to speak again his lips quivered and he mumbled incoherently.

He clapped a hand to his breast, staggered, and Jerry caught him and lowered him into the arm-chair by the desk.

"It's his heart!" wailed Eugenia; "he can't stand such excitement," and she ran out of the room.

By the time Hampton had torn open the man's collar and neck-band she was back again with a flask of brandy, and Jerry poured some of it between his lips, while the girl hurried back to the hall to telephone for a physician.

Steps sounded outside and two persons entered the hall.

"Who is there?" Jerry called sharply.

"I've been and brought a cop, as I was told," responded the chauffeur, and came into the room, followed by a booted and spurred patrolman of the mounted corps.

The stimulation restored Delroy to consciousness, but he could only sit in his chair and answer the eager questions of the policeman dully, in a guttural, querulous tone.

With the help of Hampton and Eugenia, the policeman gathered a more or less connected account of the affair, from the encounter with the man in the doorway to the dramatic escape of the second intruder.

"You think that no money was taken?" said the officer, as he jotted down notes in his book.

Delroy shook his head wearily.

"Papers," he muttered; "papers, that's all," and showed no great desire to add to the information.

"Now, if you saw the man, Mr. Del-

roy," went on the policeman, "please describe him to me as well as you can. I mean the feller that went out the window. Miss Delroy has described the first one, from seeing him in the daytime."

Delroy scowled and fidgeted, with his fingers on the arms of the chair.

"I saw him," broke in Eugenie, "just as the lights went on, just as he jumped through the window. He had on light-colored clothes, and—"

Her father interrupted her impatiently.

"I had the best view of him," he declared, with more spirit, "and he didn't have on light clothes! I was within six feet of him when he jumped, and I'd say he had on dark clothes; black, I guess—dark, anyway."

"Mr. Hampton!" cried Eugenia, appealing for support, "you saw him, didn't you? Were his clothes light or dark?"

Jerry looked at her and hesitated for an instant, then: "I certainly thought they were light," he said.

"They were black, or very dark," said Delroy, with finality, and glowered upon the others.

"I'll make a note of both opinions," the policeman announced pleasantly. "And now, Mr. Delroy, was he light or dark complected, and was he smooth-shaven or not? That's an easy one, ain't it?"

Delroy drummed more impatiently on the chair arms.

"I didn't see his face so very clearly," he answered slowly, "but I'd say he was light, and—and smooth-shaven."

"Why, father!" Eugenia protested anxiously, "you are—"

"That will do, Eugenia," Delroy interrupted with sharp authority. "You were chiefly engaged in fainting at the time, and Mr. Hampton, being young and romantic, was largely occupied in catching you and holding you. I was trying to catch the burglar, and I know what I'm talking about."

The policeman laughed appreciatively.

"I was down around Academy Street about the time it happened," he said, "but I didn't hear anything. Your chauffeur says, though, that he heard three shots from the house. How about it?"

"He lies!" declared Delroy without hesitation. "Harry's a fool, anyway. He might hear almost anything. There were no shots."

The chauffeur, standing at the back of the room, was sorely hurt.

"Now, look ahere, Mr. Delroy," he began, "I was right out there—"

"Speak when you're spoken to, Harry!" snapped his employer. "What are you standing around here for, anyway? Get out!"

"That'll be all right," said the policeman. "I guess if there'd been any shooting I'd 'a' heard it. Crooks ain't very anxious to shoot up places these times, and I don't believe you're buckin' the Sullivan law an' keepin' a gun in the house. That'll be about all, Mr. Delroy. They'll probably send a feller up from headquarters to see you about it, an' he'll want to know a lot, but this'll do for me, I guess."

As the policeman bowed himself out Delroy got up and walked over to Jerry.

"I'm very much obliged, Hampton," he said, giving him his hand, "for all you've done and tried to do to-night. Now it's all over and I don't think there's much harm done. Come in again when we all feel better, and we'll talk it over."

The chauffeur appeared once more.

"The doctor's just come up in his car," he announced grumpily; "d'you want 'im in here?"

"I certainly don't want him in the garage or the dog-house!" cried Delroy, who seemed always irritated by the sight of the man; "send him in."

"I think I'll go before he comes," said Hampton. "I hope you'll be quite recovered from your shock to-morrow, Mr. Delroy."

"Oh, I'm all right now," was the reply. "I'll have to be just bad off enough to let the doc earn his fee. Good night, Hampton."

Eugenia went to the hall with Jerry, and they met the doctor coming in.

"I'm not certain about the man's face,"

said the girl, when they were alone, "but I *am* sure about his clothes. I can't understand father's obstinacy about that!"

Jerry seemed peculiarly listless.

"I'm very sure that his clothes were light, too," he said. "Perhaps it makes no great difference."

She shook her head, gravely puzzled.

"Please come again soon, Mr. Hampton," she murmured, as he put his hand on the doorknob. "I hope we may meet some time without having unpleasantness all around us. But I do thank you for being always at hand when there's trouble, and for helping me."

"I've done little or nothing," he replied soberly, "but I shall always be ready to do anything for you, Miss Delroy."

They clasped hands, with a suspicion of embarrassment on both sides, and he went away.

He passed the physician's waiting motor-car and walked to the curve of the road. There he paused and leaned wearily against a tree, looking at the thousands of twinkling lights in the city below and beyond, and he sighed dismally and shook his head.

He was thinking of the man that had crashed his way through the library window. He had reason to feel assured that his clothes were light, for he had recognized him as Exmoor.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRICK WORTH TWO.

GRANDMOTHER HAMPTON sat up far beyond her usual hour that night, vaguely disturbed by the recent upsetting of the staid routine of her surroundings.

Before the arrival of the agreeable Mr. Tarleton, Jerry had complacently managed the affairs of the farm by day, with the expert assistance of Denny, and by night he had retired early to his chamber and devoted himself assiduously to study and the practise of writing. With a program so chaste and ordered, she had been well content and her sleep o' nights had been peaceful; but now Jerry did nothing but talk secretively in corners with the visitor, bolt his meals, and dash in and out—mostly out—upon mysterious errands.

He came in while she was thus working her cheerful soul into a state of worry, and she was appeased for the moment.

"I am all alone, Jerry," she said, "and I have a message for you from Mr. Tarleton. He was called away unexpectedly."

"Oh, he was called away!" Jerry exclaimed — with some indifference, she thought—as he slumped into a chair and sighed wearily.

"A postman fetched a special-delivery letter for him just after you went out," she explained, with careful pains; "not more than ten minutes after you'd gone. It seems like as if he got some money in the letter, for he went upstairs and then came right down and handed me a ten-dollar bill to give to you. He said it was to cover a lot of little expenses that you had met for him, and that you would understand."

"They didn't amount to half of that!" Jerry protested impatiently. "Why did he have to leave in such a hurry? Did he tell you where he was going?"

"Why, he really did leave in such a rush," the old lady explained, "that he didn't have time to tell me much about it. He said I might tell you that he would come back to-night if he could, but that it might be that he would not come back at all. He said he would communicate with you after a while, in case he didn't come back, but he thought you would understand it, anyway. He was very polite indeed, Jerry, and I'm sure he couldn't have been more appreciative of what little we have done for him."

Jerry nodded slowly.

"Yes, he's a very polite man," he said, with an odd gleam in his eye, though the old lady found nothing equivocal in his tone.

"I made sure you'd be very disappointed, Jerry," she said, a bit critically. "You and Mr. Tarleton seemed to get on

together so well, and he was such a pleasant, agreeable gentleman."

"I am," Jerry returned quietly, "very disappointed."

"You're just downright tired out, aren't you, Jerry?" she remarked solicitously, with a sudden realization of her natural responsibility. "I'll make you some milk toast and some tea, and then you go right to bed."

"Thank you," he replied kindly, "but I guess I'll take only the last part of the order. I'm not hungry, but I surely am tired."

In his room, however, some of his fatigue was forgotten. He looked quickly about for some secret message from Exmoor, but found nothing. The room was in order, and exactly as it had been on the night of the man's arrival.

Jerry sat down and lighted his pipe, and thought hard for a quarter-hour, but arrived at nothing more than fresh perplexities. As in the nature of a studious man, the bookcase appealed to him more than the bed as a source of rest, and with a whimsical smile he put out his hand at random and drew a small volume from the top shelf.

It was a lately-acquired edition of the ethics of Confucius, and he smiled to himself.

"Philosophy *a la* chop suey!" he exclaimed, and ran the pages over rapidly without much regard. His eye caught a paragraph, however, which seemed for the moment to stand out from others, and he read:

> The disease of men is this: That they neglect their own fields and go to weed the fields of others, and that what they require from others is great, while what they lay upon themselves is light.

He read the paragraph over again.

"I guess," he said to himself, "that that was aimed pretty straight at me, even if it was written a little over two thousand years ago in the rice fields of China. I'm getting altogether too keen about other people's weeds."

A single line in another part of the book fixed his attention and stirred him momentarily with its richness of thought condensed into five words:

Rotten wood cannot be carved.

Directly he thought of the ancient Chinese wood carvings that he had seen in museums. Those patient artists had labored whole lifetimes upon a slab of hard wood, to tell the story of a battle, a great episode in history, or the like, in minute but perfect figures hewn out wondrously with tools as delicate as surgeons' instruments.

Surely, their work would not have gone far upon a slab of rotten wood. He saw clearly how vital it was for the young man of high ambition to keep his tools clean and sharp, and to turn aside from all material that was not sound and hard to the very core.

He was brought back suddenly to the more matter-of-fact things around him by a sound that came in at the open window. Some of his fowls were voicing sleepy but indignant protests against, possibly, a disturber of their rest.

Jerry was on his feet and alert instantly. There were certain dark-skinned men in the tenements over on Amsterdam Avenue who would as soon eat a broiled prize Orpington pullet as a broiled barnyard chicken of humble lineage.

Broiling is the great social leveler of the poultry kingdom. Confucius himself would not have sat idle while his hen-roost was being pilfered.

He caught up a heavy walking stick and slipped quickly down the stairs and into the garden. He reconnoitered cautiously and found nothing to arouse further suspicion. The cackling had ceased; it had doubtless been no more than the result of a gallinaceous nightmare.

Satisfied that all was quiet, he went to the poultry-house door, struck a match, and found the heavy padlock there in place and undisturbed. His senses, however, still alert, were quick to perceive the mere movement of a leaf or the snapping of a twig, and such a sound suddenly

turned him about, and he faced the high fence on the eastern boundary of the farm.

The fence was like a black wall banked with blacker shadows, but there are a thousand shades of black, and the watcher's eyes, slowly adapting themselves to their task, found one that was distinct from the others. It was motionless, but he felt instinctively that it had the power of movement.

"Who is there?" Jerry demanded.

There was no response, and he picked up one of the stones under his feet and pitched it with some force at a chosen point in the darkness.

There was a gasping grunt, either of surprise or pain, and something rushed upon him precipitately. He sidestepped and threw himself forward, and in an instant was rolling on the ground with a man who seemed to match him in size and strength.

Jerry was not versed in the tricks of the wrestler, but he fought hard, with spirit and determination; and it was the same apparently with his opponent.

They grappled fiercely, writhing and kicking, feeling for each other's throats. The unknown man began panting almost at once, and he battled with the fury of despair, evidently knowing that an early victory was the only one he could hope for.

Jerry sensed this and grew cautious. He kept the other's hands from his throat and face, and strove merely to hold what little advantage rested with him from second to second.

They floundered into the thick grass and weeds back of the poultry-house, first one uppermost, then the other; and Jerry found an arm free for an instant and drove his fist hard into his antagonist's diaphragm.

The blow was followed by a sharp grunt and wheezing in the throat, and directly the man's strained muscles relaxed and yielded, and Jerry held him fast.

The stranger caught his breath again and groaned. His muscles knotted, and he heaved and tried to rid himself of the captor's embrace.

"There are policemen close by," said Jerry. "Shall I call one, or will you give in to me?"

The other gained breath enough to swear with feeling.

"Who — who are *you,* anyway?" he gasped.

"Introductions should begin with you," returned Jerry; "you didn't come here at my bidding. If you are interested in fancy poultry you might better have written to me and asked for an appointment. The fowls look better by daylight, too."

He got to his feet as he spoke and allowed the man to rise, but watched him guardedly.

"You think I came to steal chickens!" the stranger exclaimed.

"There's little else here," was the reply. "You could scarcely hope to get the cow over the fence, and you couldn't lead her out at the gate without being caught by somebody."

The stranger paused, breathing heavily.

"It would be idiotic for me to make up a story to explain my being here," he said presently; "only a drunken man could say that he got into such a place as this by accident."

"How about the insanity plea?" Jerry suggested. "That's usually good when everything else fails."

The man grunted—whether with disgust or amusement could not be determined in the darkness.

"That comes painfully near it in my case, I guess," he replied bitterly. "I suppose I shall have to give you some explanation. I came here to—to find a man. I wanted to find him to-night; to-morrow won't do."

"We can hardly pass you on that," said Jerry. "If this were a hotel, or something like that, your story might sound reasonable, but we don't have men quartered in the poultry-house or the cow stable. I am the only man in the house, and as it appears that I am not the man you were looking for, we are back where we started from. You'll have to try again."

"I don't believe that you are the only

man in the house!" declared the other, with sudden spirit. "You have a man staying here; he was here last night, and I believe that he's here now. I've got to see him. It's a private matter—devilish private! That's why I didn't come in at the gate and knock on your door. I got over the fence, and made such a racket that it stirred up those infernal chickens."

"Like the geese of Rome," Jerry remarked. "Well, you've had a good deal of trouble for nothing; I am the only man here. I wonder," he added, deciding to put a suspicion to a test, "if you and I haven't met before—possibly to-night?"

"I am a stranger in the city," the man replied coldly; "I haven't met any one since I came here."

Jerry had one hand in a pocket of his coat and he found a box of matches there. While he talked he got a match out of the box.

"I didn't mean that we met in a social way," he explained; "the man I am trying to identify you with I met in anything but a social way—yes, he was notably unsocial."

As he uttered the last word he whipped his hand from his pocket and the match flared in the stranger's face.

He saw a white countenance, a slightly gray beard—a man of about fifty, as Eugenia Delroy had described the object of her anxiety.

A sharp cry, a quick puff from the man's lips, and the match was out. A foot was driven with force into Jerry's stomach, and he doubled up.

He fell, but rolled over swiftly and struggled to regain his feet. A hard object cracked upon his head, and he fell prone and lay without stirring.

CHAPTER XIII.

MYSTERY DEEPENS.

WHEN Jerry Hampton regained the power of thought and motion there was gray light all around him. He was lying in dewy grass, the morning was cloudy and chill, and his sensations were much like those often linked with the "cold, gray dawn."

His head was throbbing painfully, and his hand, applied tenderly to it, discovered a mound-like welt along the left side of the scalp.

Fortunately, it was not time for the grandmother to be up and about, so he staggered to his feet and made all haste to the house, to conceal from her, if possible, all traces of the misadventure.

The ache in his head almost blinded him and he was still dazed, but recollections of what had occurred quickly brought anxiety and alarm. The man had been intent, it seemed, upon gaining access to the house, so it was to be supposed that he had made the best of his opportunity.

The main room on the first floor answered Jerry's query at a glance; the drawers and the cabinet portion of the old secretary had been ransacked; letters, papers and matters of all sorts lay strewn about the floor; books had been pulled from the shelves and dropped; the man had spared no pains to create a scene of disorder.

Without pushing his investigation further, Jerry frantically gathered the things together and replaced them as well as he could in his haste, then tiptoed up-stairs to the old lady's room. Her door, habitually closed, was ajar, and he knew that the intruder had omitted no room in his raid.

Jerry looked in, and his relief was profound when he saw her sleeping quietly—proof enough that she had not been disturbed.

His own room was next, and it was in much the same condition as the one down-stairs. The dresser drawers had been pulled out and left on the floor, and a thoroughgoing search had been made for —something!

He put the room to rights hurriedly, lest his grandmother should stop at his door on arising, then applied cold water to his head and brushed his hair in a manner to conceal the memento of the

midnight encounter. Not until these precautions were observed did he sit down to think out the immediate problem.

It would be natural and probably right, he mused, to report all the circumstances to the police at once, but his inclination to do so was not strong. As far as he could learn the man had taken nothing. If robbery had been his motive, he had scorned to take the available plunder, even to a purse containing a small amount of money, and it was evident that he had gone away empty handed.

He had told something of the truth, it seemed; he was looking for another man, it was obvious that Exmoor was that man.

Here, then, was a mysterious triangle, Jerry reflected whimsically; the unknown man was spying upon the Delroy house and seeking entrance to it, and was apparently no less desirous of finding Exmoor, or something that was in his possession; Delroy, as it had early developed, was on a determined hunt for Exmoor, and the latter had entered Delroy's house by force and burglarized it.

The respective attitudes of Delroy and Exmoor toward the unknown man remained matters for conjecture, but it was inconceivable that they would prove to be indifferent or benign.

The grandmother called Jerry to breakfast, and he shook himself together and went down-stairs resolved upon one thing at least; that he would not communicate with the police until further developments warranted such a movement.

The old lady's cheery morning manner verified the guess that she had not been disturbed during the night. She remarked that Jerry looked tired and nervous, and that he needed a rest after all the gadding about that he had done for their recent guest.

Jerry agreed with her good humoredly at every point, and kept his inmost thoughts to himself. His conscience welcomed another and stronger reason for his inaction with regard to the mysterious disturber of the peace: if the old lady learned that the house had been raided by a burglar, she would not rest easy again for many a day. His hands were tied, and he was content to sit and wait for the problem in geometry to work itself out.

The morning was not far advanced when the farm was honored by a visit from Milton Delroy. He "just dropped in," he said, to pay a long intended call on Mrs. Hampton and review the agricultural activities of her grandson, which always excited his admiration and envy.

The old lady was flattered, and she did the honors of the house for an hour. Jerry sat through it, vaguely ill at ease, but Delroy maintained a bland good humor which Jerry knew he did not feel.

The guest rose at last and suggested a visit to the poultry-yard and garden, and in a moment the two men were alone.

"You may have guessed that I am not here this morning merely for social reasons," said the visitor, with unblushing abruptness.

Jerry nodded.

"After all that happened last night," he replied, "I don't see how you could feel very sociable this morning."

Delroy assumed an air of man-to-man directness.

"Tell me, Hampton," he said, "how did you come to know Exmoor?"

"Exmoor!" Jerry exclaimed, unable to conceal his surprise. "Why, how do you happen to ask me that? How should I—"

"There is no sense in dissembling either on your part or mine, Hampton," Delroy said, with unusual determination. "I didn't have to look at you twice last night to see that you recognized him. Neither are you obtuse enough to have missed the fact that I recognized him. To go further, you must have a fair idea of what the recognition meant to me.

"I am a man of some poise, and I am not without a certain amount of courage; I don't go all to pieces even at a burglary in ordinary circumstances. I am frank to say that the sight of Exmoor and the later discovery of what he had done gave me a bad turn. The man is my enemy.

He is leaving no stone unturned to ruin me in business. I hope you will tell me what you know of him, Hampton."

Jerry was thoughtful for a moment.

"I know virtually nothing of him, except as one knows a chance acquaintance," he said.

"Your grandmother said nothing of the Mr. Tarleton who has been visiting you," Delroy went on, eyeing him shrewdly, "and you may wonder that I didn't quiz her. I didn't think that I could learn much more from her than I have learned already from my daughter. Eugenia has told me of how near she came to running you and Mr. Tarleton down with her car. She has also told me of Mr. Tarleton's gallant part in the unpleasant little episode in the restaurant. She didn't recognize 'Mr. Tarleton' as he jumped from the library window last night, but she described him clearly enough from her first meeting with him, so that the identity is established. He was staying here with you, I dare say, when I received the telegram from Philadelphia."

"I don't think I care to go into details to any extent, Mr. Delroy," Jerry replied. "I am not a party to this present affair, and I'd rather not be."

"Of course," said Delroy suavely, "you wouldn't refuse to tell the police what you know?"

"If you are going to make a police case of it," was the answer, "why, then—"

"Well, I'm not!" the other interrupted, with an air of becoming confidential. "I allowed the police to be called in when I lost my head, but you know that I told the patrolman precious little. They are looking for a burglar, not for Exmoor. Exmoor is not a burglar—I only wish he were—and Exmoor is not easily caught. How did you come to know him, Hampton? Tell me that much!"

"In the most casual way. We just ran across each other, as it were, and got acquainted as men will. As a matter of fact, we were both swimming in the Hudson River at the time. That's about all I can tell you, Mr. Delroy; but I might tell you that a man came here to see him last night, and happened to be the same man who bowled me over earlier in the evening at your house."

"Ah!" cried Delroy, with vast satisfaction. "I was going to ask you about that other fellow."

"Yes, he dropped in here," Jerry went on, "and he was so importunate in the matter of his errand that he—well, I'm ashamed to say that he bowled me over again. Then he made a good job of ransacking my house, but I can't find that he took anything away with him."

Delroy's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"Did you see him in the light that time," he cried. "Did you get a look at his face?"

"Miss Delroy had already described him," answered Jerry; "he was the man who alarmed her during the day—a man of perhaps fifty, with a grayish beard."

"Kingsale!" shouted Delroy, so loudly that Denny, the farmhand, looked up from his work in the garden with a start. The shout, however, was as eloquent of gratification as of anything else.

"He seemed a rather desperate character, for a man of his age and appearance," said Jerry, "but you don't seem disturbed about it."

Delroy smiled enigmatically.

"They say that 'hawks dinna pyke out hawks' een,'" he replied, "but I'd trust one of those hawks to spoil the other's hunting for him. If a fox and a hound meet while chasing the same rabbit, the rabbit has a fair show of getting away."

"You say that Exmoor is trying to ruin you in business," Jerry remarked, frankly curious. "I understood that you were retired, Mr. Delroy; I never heard that you were in any active business."

"I am retired," the other answered directly, "but a retired man has to have an income. Your friend Exmoor is trying to deprive me of my means of living, and incidentally he is trying to deprive Eugenia of her own little private fortune."

Jerry took the statement with a grain of salt.

"But in legitimate business," he protested, "you can't rob people under their very noses. The laws are inadequate enough and easily twisted, to be sure, but they protect a man in ordinary cases."

"That's it!" exclaimed the other, with a sigh; "this is an extraordinary case, Hampton!"

"I don't see how I can be of any help to you," said Jerry thoughtfully. "I couldn't tell you any more of either man than you know already, and I don't know any more of Exmoor's whereabouts than you do."

Delroy shook his head sadly.

"Then we'll have to let it go at that," he said.

He pondered for a moment, then lifted his head with the air of throwing off the pall of gloom, and added: "Don't let anything that has happened keep you from coming to our house, Hampton. Don't get the idea that I blame you for anything. Eugenia is considerably upset about last night, as you may suppose; she doesn't care to go out and she's apprehensive of further trouble. She likes you, Hampton—better than any of the young men she knows, I fancy."

Jerry looked up suspiciously.

"That's very gratifying, I'm sure," he said perfunctorily. "Recent events have been bewildering, and I feel that I hardly understand anything that's going on, but you said once that Miss Delroy was—"

The older man checked him with a deprecatory gesture.

"Forget that, Hampton," he said earnestly. "I was misled with regard to that fellow Foxford. I fear that I rather forced him on Eugenia. Naturally, after that outrageous behavior of his, he will not be received at our house again. I want you to come often; I want you to feel that you are welcome. You and I have had our little squabbles, but you were always straightforward and manly about it. You have my respect and hearty good will, Hampton."

Jerry was confused by the excess of cordiality.

"Thank you," he returned simply; "I shall be glad to call on Miss Delroy."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONTRABAND OF WAR.

A DOWN-TOWN dealer in small live stock for the suburbanite needed an Orpington cockerel for a customer, and as Jerry Hampton needed its equivalent in cash, an exchange was agreed upon. Jerry wished to talk with the dealer regarding further transfers of surplus stock, so he undertook the delivery of the bird himself.

On the morning of the day after Milton Delroy's visit he placed the cockerel in a small, inconspicuous box and set forth for Cortlandt Street by the subway. The early "rush hour" was over, so he took his rather awkward package into the front car of an express train in order that it should not be a stumbling block to fellow passengers as the train filled up.

When the train slowed down on the curve at Times Square he was sitting sidewise, looking out of the window, and he saw an up-town local standing at the opposite platform. The heads of the people on the local flashed past him like figures of a panorama as his train gathered speed again, but as the last car snapped out of view and left the blackness of the tunnel behind it, he caught his breath and almost jumped out of his seat.

His eye had caught and recorded a lightning view, but a clear one, of the face that he had seen in the match light, just before the kick and the blow had felled him.

Jerry, poised on the edge of his seat, thought quickly and desperately. The local train, northward bound, had four more stations to stop at before it reached Seventy-Second Street.

His own train glided into the glaring light of the Grand Central station, and he caught up his box and dashed to the door. A glance across the tracks as he darted onto the platform showed an up-town express pulling in, and he made for the stairs wildly, holding the box before him and

jostling indignant passengers on right and left.

He crossed the bridge and sped down the opposite stairs at the risk of his neck. The guard of the nearest car of the express was sliding the door into place, but Jerry uttered a startling yell, leaped the intervening space and thrust his package into the aperture in time to hold the door.

"Whatstmatterwidyer!" yelled the outraged guard, as he reluctantly slid open the door again and let the man follow the package.

"Much obliged!" exclaimed Jerry, panting; "I had to make this train—next one wouldn't do."

He entered the car and sank into a seat, while the guard gave the starting bell and soliloquized darkly.

As the express shot up-town Jerry sat with his eyes wide open for the local that he was pursuing. There was a local just leaving the Times Square station, and he figured that it was the next behind the one he wanted. Columbus Circle was passed without sight of another, then Sixty-Sixth Street flashed by. He leaned forward, holding his breath, and as the express rumbled into the Seventy-Second Street stop he saw the local standing at the platform.

Out he shot, not a second behind the opening of the doors, but just one second too late. The doors of the local slammed in his face and the starting bells jangled.

"Express to Dyckman Street!" the guards were yelling on the train he had quitted, and he darted back without a moment's hesitation, once more running afoul the same guard and forcing him to hold the door for an instant.

"You're a nut, all right!" muttered the guard, and Jerry smiled at him in complete agreement, then dropped his box in the vestibule and fixed his eyes on the window.

As the express got under way it overhauled the slower-running local, and with great joy the watcher had another glimpse of the gray-bearded man in the last car. The local had three stops to make before the next express station, so there were three chances of the man's eluding him, but he trusted to luck.

The Orpington cockerel cackled a dignified protest as the box was set down with a thump on the platform at Ninety-Sixth Street, but the bearer paid no heed; he was watching at the rear of the platform for the second local to pull in, another one having been passed about Ninety-Third Street.

He had not dreamed, he told himself, that locals crawled so snail-like; it seemed an interminable time before the two white head lamps came in sight, and the cars lumbered past him with tantalizing slowness. Then came the last one, and he almost cried out for joy when he saw his man still there.

Without haste now, he stepped into the front vestibule of the car, put down his box, and stood with his back to the front end, concealing himself from the passengers within.

At every station after that he stood ready to grab the box and get out, as he held his hand up to conceal his face and eyed all those who alighted.

At One Hundred and Thirty-Seventh Street, the end of the local's run, the man got out, and Jerry followed at a discreet distance and saw him walk to the other end of the platform and lean against a post to wait for a train bound farther north. Jerry retired behind another post and waited too, and when a Van Cortlandt Park train stopped he stepped into the rear vestibule of the car selected by the other man and stood so that he could watch his movements without being himself observed.

Delroy had called the man Kingsale, but Jerry was not convinced that that was his name. It would do as well as any other, however, and he was quite satisfied with the manner in which things were moving.

He saw his recent assailant clearly now for the first time. He was, as Eugenia had said, about fifty, and his hair and pointed beard were tinged with gray. He had nothing of the aspect of a criminal, but was, on the contrary, rather quiet and

respectable in appearance—the type, in a general way, of the well-to-do middle-class business man.

The name Kingsale suggested English origin, but there was nothing about the dress or manner of the man to connect him with a definite locality.

As the train got farther up-town Kingsale consulted a scrap of paper as if to verify some traveling directions, and a moment later he produced a small pocket-guide to the city and spread a map upon his knee while he traced certain lines upon it with the end of his finger.

At Two Hundred and Seventh Street he got up suddenly, as the train stopped, crammed the map and book into his pocket and left the car by the front end. Jerry had little time enough to catch up the box and scramble to the platform.

As the subway ceases to be a subterranean system at Dyckman Street and becomes a light and airy elevated structure, both men now stood in the full glare of day, and Jerry feared for a moment that he would be recognized. Luck was constantly at his elbow that morning, however, and Kingsale, facing the other way, stepped to the railing of the platform and looked down to the street.

Jerry saw little protection in the slim steel pillars of the structure, and he made the best of the opportunity by darting into the space at the end of a large chest which was placed on the platform for the storage of accumulated waste paper.

Peering over the top of the chest he saw Kingsale make a signal with his hand to some one below, then turn, and go hurriedly down the stairs to the street.

Jerry followed close at his heels, keeping out of sight, and when he paused half way down and peered over the railing, he saw Kingsale and a dark-skinned, poorly-clad man walking briskly up Tenth Avenue. Kingsale's manner was furtive, and he glanced behind him from time to time, and at Two Hundred and Eighth Street both men stopped and looked all about them, then hurried on, evidently satisfied that they were not spied upon.

Jerry Hampton, stealing carefully down the stairs, smiled suddenly at his own assured attitude of suspicion. The man under suspicion cannot move without appearing to dissemble, and it might be that Kingsale was out this morning on no more desperate errand than was Jerry himself; it was even conceivable that he might meet the dark-skinned man on no more momentous business than the transfer of a rooster. Jerry preferred to give suspicion the benefit of the doubt, however.

He allowed the men to gain two full blocks on him, then he crossed the avenue and proceeded northward at the same pace they were keeping. He carried the box well up in his arms, to give himself as much as possible the appearance of a tradesman going about his business. Kingsale, so far as he knew, had seen him only by that flash of a match, and he would never guess that a man bearing a heavy box through the streets was trailing him.

Presently the two men turned east into the sparsely settled sand lots that border the Harlem River, and Jerry promptly hurried forward and took the same direction on a street a block short of the one they had chosen. Between the two streets there were scattering houses and laborers' shacks and rank growths of tall weeds and scrub, but from time to time he could see the men, and he managed to keep abreast of them.

Down at the water's edge there was a little village of shacks and boat-houses, and there were four house-boats in sight, one of which was drawn up on the land and apparently converted to urban uses. Another, anchored some thirty feet from shore, was seemingly in commission, for it had an awning stretched over the narrow after deck and a small tender was moored to the landing steps.

Kingsale and his companion stopped suddenly at a point where Jerry could see them by peering through the bushes, and the dark man pointed, as nearly as the watcher could make out, to the house-boat with the awning.

Instantly the two turned and retraced

their steps, but Kingsale halted again, waved his hand airily to the other and sauntered into the open lot, as though strolling idly about for recreation. The dark man went on and disappeared in the direction of Broadway.

There was now a chance that Kingsale, strolling, would come upon the spy at a place where cover was inadequate, so Jerry made all haste to conceal the box under a thick clump of weeds, then crept into the adjacent thicket himself and drew the weeds and grasses about him.

To his consternation, but nevertheless to his whimsical amusement, Kingsale turned directly toward him.

"If he finds me," said Jerry to himself, "the knock-out will not come to me this time; I am no longer a respecter of age or persons!"

The man came on and paused within twenty feet of the hiding place, but his object seemed to be a better view of the house-boat on the river.

Suddenly both watcher and watched were startled by an uncanny sound close at hand. A muffled, sepulchral crow rose from the bank of weeds, and Kingsale jumped nervously and stared about him with wide eyes.

Jerry was no less startled at the instant, but as realization came he had to choke back the laugh that almost escaped him. The young Orpington rooster, in durance vile, was asserting his independence with the characteristic valor of his kind.

The crow was repeated, and Kingsale's drawn face relaxed in a sort of ghastly smile. He made straight for the spot indicated by the sound and pulled the box from its cover. He stooped and read the printed label on the lid, and his brows contracted with perplexity as he noted Jerry Hampton's name and address.

He stood erect again and surveyed the surroundings with care, but he did not go so far as to explore the thickets. His eyes fell on the house-boat, and he smiled grimly and nodded as though arriving at some roundabout explanation.

A light burst upon Jerry with the other's smile of fancied understanding: Exmoor was on that house-boat, and Kingsale believed that the rooster was cached there for him to replenish his larder. Exmoor was in hiding, and he would come ashore after dark to collect his supplies.

Kingsale meanwhile was busy on his own account. It is the part of good generalship to despoil the enemy in any manner possible, and a movement against the commissariat is of vital importance. Therefore, with an expression of unmistakable glee, he undid the fastenings of the box and threw back the lid.

The cockerel raised his head and regarded his liberator with suspicion for a moment, then hopped upon the edge of the box and went fluttering and scampering away with raucous calls of defiance—to become, Jerry mused gloomily, the autocrat of some Harlem River back-yard hennery, or, less happily, a mere pot-pie for some worthy Italian household.

Kingsale was not through with the box. Still smiling, and still turning the enemy munitions to his own account, he picked it up and bore it farther into the thicket; and Jerry, rashly stretching up and peering over the branches, saw him put it down and sit on it, thereby establishing for himself a more comfortable place of concealment and observation than the owner of the box had dared to secure for himself.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME HARLEM HAPPENINGS.

THE glare of midday gave place to the mellow glow of afternoon, and Jerry was still crouched in his thicket, uncomfortable and impatient, but virtually unable to move. He could hear twigs crackle now and then, but he could not see Kingsale without standing up and risking discovery.

The other man was evidently waiting for something to happen with the heroic patience of an Indian, and it behooved the

second observer to adopt a similar stoicism.

A bird flew into the thicket within a yard of Jerry's head, then discovered him, squalled indignantly and fluttered out in great perturbation. If Kingsale had been a skilled woodsman or a graduate boy scout he would have read a danger signal in that, but it did not disturb him.

Kingsale enjoyed the luxury of moving, of rustling the branches as much as he pleased, for he feared no observer short of the house-boat, but Jerry had to remain motionless, cramped and miserable. Both had a fairly uninterrupted view of the box-like craft, and Jerry resolved to watch it until something happened to break the spell.

The afternoon waned, but with tedious slowness. Laborers returning from their work came to the scattered houses swinging dinner pails, and it made Jerry hungry to see them. He began to feel resentment toward the boat, the man near him, and most of all toward himself for taking up such an enterprise.

As the shadows deepened and the light grew more ruddy he relaxed his vigilance through sheer weariness, but he was suddenly made alert by an excited movement on the part of his neighbor. Instinctively he glanced at the boat and saw a small skiff coming in sight around its stern.

The tender was still moored to the steps, and it was conceivable that the moving boat had started from the far side of the larger craft and come around it in order to mislead an observer.

The lone man in the skiff was unrecognizable, at the distance, in a black soft hat pulled low on his head, and dark clothes. He rowed slowly to the shore, drew the skiff up on the bank, and came up the street where Kingsale and the dark man had stood.

As he drew nearer Jerry could see his face under the sagging brim of the hat, and it was clean shaven except for a close clipped mustache, while the eyes were masked with large-bowed spectacles.

He regarded his walk and carriage for an instant, vaguely perplexed, then a second glance at the face brought recognition. It was Exmoor beyond all doubt, and he had removed his beard and put on spectacles in order to assume another disguise.

Exmoor passed along the street, glancing neither to right nor left, crossed the avenue at the corner, and kept on westward until he was out of sight.

Jerry hoped for relief now from his vigil, but some fifteen minutes passed without event; then the cautious Kingsale stepped quietly from his retreat, looked about until he was satisfied that the field was clear, and sauntered down the other street and along the bank to the point where Exmoor had disembarked.

Jerry stood up and stretched himself with luxurious sighs of satisfaction, and advanced through the brush to a point that commanded a better view of the water. He saw Kingsale enter the skiff and push off, and row deliberately around the stern of the house-boat, out of sight.

He was reluctant to make free with the property of other people, but there was a small landing stage at the water's edge with half a dozen old boats tied to it, and as there was no one in sight to question his act, he ran down and commandeered one of the boats and a pair of oars that lay on the landing.

Taking care not to glance at the house-boat again, he rowed slowly down the river as far as Two Hundred and Seventh Street, then circled about and pulled back on the port side of the house-boat, which was facing south.

From the corner of his eye he could see the boat tied at the rail, but on board the house-boat there was no sign of movement. The movement, he reflected, was all within the cabin; and he could readily fancy Kingsale upsetting and rifling lockers and boxes with his almost military thoroughness.

He was half disposed to go aboard and interfere, but there were questions in his mind. He was no longer honestly in sympathy with Exmoor, much as he had liked the man at first; his actions had been too

darkly involved in mystery to sustain confidence, and whatever his motive had been in breaking and entering the Delroy house, the method was too high handed for toleration.

Kingsale had, perhaps, as good a right to burglarious methods as Exmoor. Jerry decided to hold to his part of observer and keep hands off.

He pulled the boat up to Two Hundred and Twelfth Street, turned again, and resumed his patrol. He laughed whimsically as he pictured the raider at his task, and was careful not to look too curiously at the craft as he passed it.

His caution ceased, however, when there was a sudden agitated movement under the awning at the stern. A man sprang up, apparently from a concealed reclining chair or hammock, appeared to stop and listen to sounds from the cabin, and then darted around to the door on the side, burst it open, and rushed in.

Jerry stopped rowing and sat in the drifting boat, blankly amazed. He was so near the deck that he had recognized the man, and it was Foxford, the bibulous young man of the adventure in the restaurant.

The houseboat was now no longer wrapped in silence. Loud voices, shouts, and sounds of a spirited encounter came from the cabin. Two figures came spinning through the door and revolved dizzily on the narrow side deck for an instant; then one of them shot over the rail and disappeared in a great splash of the drab river water.

Jerry's boat was well beyond the bows of the larger craft as the thing happened, and he grasped his oars and pulled across the bows, out of sight, before the excited man on the deck perceived him. He heard the door banged savagely, and on backing cautiously he found that the victor in the scrimmage had retired within and left the vanquished to shift for himself.

A head bobbed up, with a pair of fluttering, frantic hands, some thirty feet away, and Jerry turned his boat and pulled for the spot as the man disappeared again.

He waited, bending over the water, and the head came to the surface once more near the stern. He dropped his oars, scrambled aft, and seized the drowning man's hair just in time.

In an instant he had him by the shoulders, and though he was inexperienced as a boatman he managed with a deal of tugging and tipping of the boat to haul the body aboard. He was not surprised to find that he had rescued Kingsale, and as he sat on a thwart, flushed and panting from the exertion, he could not repress a whimsical smile at the irony of things in general.

CHAPTER XVI.

PERSISTENT TRAILING.

KINGSALE lay in the bottom of the boat, half senseless, but suffering more from his tussle with young Foxford than from near approach to drowning. He had been well nigh exhausted, it seemed, when he was thrown overboard, and his battle against the water had been feeble in consequence, but Jerry decided, upon examination, that no great amount of water had been taken into his lungs.

He rowed, now, for the nearest place that seemed to promise assistance: the old houseboat that was drawn up on the bank and used as a dwelling. He tied the boat to the commodious landing stage in front of the structure, and knocked on the door.

A pleasant-faced woman responded and he told her briefly that he had pulled a man out of the river and needed help in reviving him.

The woman was instantly solicitous. She called a young man from one of the inner rooms, and the latter went to the boat with Jerry, lifted the limp form from it and carried it into the house. The young man was a practised waterman, and he went at the task of resuscitation with the skill of one accustomed to river accidents.

Respiration was restored and the cold body was rubbed with alcohol until it

glowed again. In an hour Kingsale was able to sit up and regard his surroundings intelligently, and his first action was to reach out anxiously for his coat.

Jerry handed it to him, and he groped with a shaking hand in the breast-pocket for a moment. His eyes brightened perceptibly as he drew forth a fat packet enclosed in a brown fiber envelope, and he paid no heed to the witnesses as he opened it and eagerly fingered a dozen or more folded papers which were only slightly wet at the edges from the water that had soaked through the stout fiber fabric.

"Scarcely hurt at all, sir," remarked the young man of the houseboat dwelling; "and you'll be all right yourself after you've had a good sleep."

Kingsale nodded in agreement and smiled slightly. He explored the pocket again and found a water-logged leather wallet. From that he produced a number of soggy bank notes, and counted off fifty dollars.

"Young man," he said hoarsely, and somewhat feebly, "I am not wealthy and at present I am short of ready cash, but I must ask you to accept this in return for your hospitality and service. I have to thank this other gentleman for saving my life," he added with a peculiar look at Jerry, "and I shall have some difficulty in repaying him for the service. Some lives are hard to appraise, you know."

The young man expostulated, but his eyes lingered upon the money and he was at last prevailed on to accept it. The pleasant-faced woman reappeared and suggested supper for the gentlemen, but Kingsale demurred; he declared that he was able to start for home, and must do so without more delay.

"If you have a telephone," Jerry said to the woman, "I will order a taxicab."

"No, no!" exclaimed Kingsale, "I really don't want a cab; I'm quite able to walk to the subway; and that will get me home quicker than a cab could do it."

There was some further argument, but the man's will prevailed, and he and Jerry set forth at eight o'clock. The wet clothes had dried but slightly, and he shivered as they clung ludicrously to his frame.

He was reluctant to lean on Jerry's arm, and Jerry could see that he feared to go with him through the quiet, deserted streets.

"You are the man of—of the miniature farm on the hill?" he asked abruptly, as they approached the subway station.

"Yes, I am," Jerry answered dryly; "I am the man that you were successful in knocking out a couple of times."

"It was necessary," returned Kingsale soberly; "but I regret it very much. The situation is peculiar now, isn't it? I have good reason to feel uneasy in your company, considering my weakened condition, but I can't forget that I should be at the bottom of the river now if you had not come to the rescue."

"Returning good for evil is very flattering to one's vanity," said Jerry, "so you may consider that I already have my reward. As for other matters between us, you needn't be uneasy."

"How did you happen to be on the river?" inquired the other.

"For no more mysterious reason than you happened to be on the houseboat," was the reply, and it made the man start nervously. "If I may ask," Jerry added, "I am curious to know if you ever met Foxford before?"

"Foxford!" echoed Kingsale; "I don't know the name. Was it—"

"The tall young man who interfered with your work."

Kingsale grew more nervous.

"You evidently saw a good deal of the affair," he remarked. "No, I never saw him before, but I hope we shall meet again. He was a young ruffian!"

Jerry smiled, but forebore to point to the irony of the observation.

"Pardon me if I ask if you got what you went after," he said, half facetiously.

They had climbed the stairs to the station platform, and in the bright light, with a number of people standing near, the man seemed to gain confidence.

"Since you seem to know so much about

my business," he answered, a trifle truculently, "I will say that I did get what I went after. You may tell Exmoor that, if you like, but I fancy that he'll know it even before you see him."

Jerry shrugged indifferently.

"I congratulate you," he said. "I can assure you that I don't know the merits of the case. It seems my fortune—good or bad, as you please—to know all the parties to it, and I confess that I don't know much in favor of any one of you; but I'll congratulate any man who gets what he goes after. Perhaps I ought to feel really glad about it, for there will be less likelihood of you raiding my house and farm again."

They stepped aboard a down-town express and rode in silence to One Hundred and Sixty-Eighth Street.

"You needn't come any farther with me," said Kingsale, rising as the train stopped; "I'm almost myself again now."

But he tottered and swayed weakly as he spoke, and Jerry caught his arm and helped him to alight, then went with him to the street above and refused to leave him until he was safely home.

The man gave in with surprisingly little protest, and Jerry was at once convinced that he would not learn much from him by strategy.

They walked slowly to Audubon Avenue and north as far as One Hundred and Seventy-Third Street, where Kingsale stopped at the entrance to an apartment house.

"I don't think I've heard your name, sir," he said.

"Hampton," responded Jerry.

"I dare say that we shall meet again, Mr. Hampton," Kingsale went on, "and some time I may be able to return something more than thanks for the great service you have done me. I am not ungrateful, whatever else I may be. By the way, I believe you left a fowl in a certain place for a certain person," he added; "your name was on the box that contained it. How much was that fowl worth, Mr. Hampton?"

"The fowl," answered Jerry, with a peculiar smile, "has already been charged to 'loss and gain.' Think no more about it, Mr. Kingsale."

The man held out his hand and Jerry took it. There were some further protestations of gratitude, and then Kingsale walked into the vestibule of the house in a thoroughly at-home manner, and Jerry turned and went rapidly away.

After going south one block, however, he slipped suddenly into a dark doorway on the opposite side of the avenue and fixed his eyes on the house he had left. He was thoroughly tired and felt that he had had enough of adventure for one day, but he waited, never taking his eyes from the house, and a half hour passed.

Sleep began to steal upon him, his eyelids drooped and he felt himself nodding, when his man suddenly darted out of the house and hurried northward at a brisk pace. Jerry barely saw him, in a flash of the eye, but he was sure of the identity and he started after him with fresh zeal, keeping carefully in the shadows.

He saw him swing around the corner of One Hundred and Seventy-Sixth Street, going strong in spite of his recent weakness, and he took a long chance and ran at top speed through One Hundred and Seventy-Fifth Street to Amsterdam Avenue. A Greek peanut vender was trundling a hand-cart along the avenue, with the whistle of a peanut roaster shrilling merrily, and with instant inspiration Jerry ran to him.

"Let me push your cart for you," he said, "and I'll give you a dollar."

The Greek was incredulous and suspicious. He waved his arms in eloquent protest at such madness. Jerry flourished a dollar bill before his eyes.

"I'll give you that just to let me push the cart," he repeated, "and you can walk one block behind me and see that I don't get away with the peanuts."

He helped out his explanation with gestures, and the Greek, convinced of his insanity, decided to humor him and secure the "easy money."

Jerry saw Kingsale round the corner above, and he whipped off his hat, turned up his collar and began trundling the cart along the pavement, with his back bent over the handles. By hurrying, he gained one of the two blocks that lay between them at the start, then slowed to an even pace and held it.

Kingsale stopped once in a shady place and took observations, but it was evident that he cast no suspicious glance at the man trundling the peanut cart.

The thought occurred to Jerry that his fugitive might take it into his head to buy a bag of peanuts, but peanuts are for the light-hearted and frivolous, and it was unlikely that a man still wet and shivering from a well-nigh fatal ducking would think of such an indulgence.

Block after block was covered, up a steadily increasing grade, and the pursuer's arms and legs ached from weariness and the unwonted exertion. He had never dreamed that peanut carts were burdens for draft horses rather than men.

He expected to see Kingsale stop at some tenement house on Amsterdam Avenue, or cross Washington Bridge to The Bronx, but One Hundred and Eighty-First Street was passed while he was thinking about it and Kingsale was toiling up the rising grade to Fort George hill.

"If he's headed for a merry-go-round or a beer garden," Jerry thought glumly, "I may yet have to heave to and play the full part of a peanut seller."

The run ended, however, just beyond the broad lawn of the Isabella Heimath at One Hundred and Ninetieth Street. Kingsale crossed to the east side of the avenue, glanced behind him with an air of easy assurance, and turned abruptly into the obscure side door of an abandoned shooting gallery.

Jerry was no more than thirty paces in the rear when he disappeared, and as he heard some inner door open and shut he waved his hand to the Greek rearguard and abandoned the cart. Depending on Kingsale's bold assurance, he ran just as boldly to the dark doorway and listened. He heard men in animated conversation, evidently two of them, but their voices were too low to make their words intelligible.

After a moment Jerry stepped back and made mental notes on the place.

There were battered shooting gallery signs spread across the front and a representation of a rifle and target in wood on the post by the entrance; but the building was ramshackle, and seemed to have been out of commission for a season or more. There were no windows on the front, and the space above the old counter of the gallery had been tightly boarded in.

He did not want Kingsale to find him there if he came out, so he crossed the avenue and climbed the precipitous rocks to the remains of the old Revolutionary fortifications. There he sat down in a rocky hollow, and there he remained until midnight, drowsy and nodding at times, but never fully off his guard.

No person left or entered the old building, and when he was satisfied that he had found at least the temporary headquarters of the man he climbed higher, to the plateau above the rocks, and after a short-cut across the open lots was at the door of his own house.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WORKING ALLIANCE.

THE grandmother at the breakfast table upbraided Jerry good humoredly for his continued late hours.

"And this time," she added archly, "you missed a visitor that I'm sure you'd 'a' been very glad to see. Mr. Tarleton called about eight o'clock."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jerry, concealing his excitement, "Mr. Tarleton called, did he? Then he has returned to town; or didn't he leave town at all?"

"He's very, very busy," the old lady explained, "and he just ran over here to see you because he had to go right out of town again. He said he just wanted to shake your hand and say 'howdedo,' and he was

in an awful hurry; he didn't wait more'n fifteen minutes."

"That's too bad," said Jerry dryly, but the old lady didn't perceive the quality of the tone. "Well, he will probably come again, some time, and then perhaps I can explain my absence to him."

"Oh, he didn't say he had any appointment with you," she rejoined. "I don't think he was a bit offended."

"I hope not, I'm sure," Jerry murmured vaguely, and the grandmother declared that his ways were very peculiar when he was suffering from loss of sleep.

Breakfast was scarcely over when Milton Delroy "just dropped in" again. He exchanged flattering greetings with the grandmother and then apologized for desiring to see Jerry alone on a little matter of business. At his suggestion they walked into the garden and paced up and down the patch while they talked.

"I don't want to bore you, Hampton," said the older man, "but I can't help feeling that you are really a good friend of mine. We understand each other better than we used to, I believe, and—I scarcely know why—but I think of you constantly as one of my really good friends. You have done some very gallant and valuable services for Eugenia and me, and—"

"I'm sure you exaggerate them," protested Jerry, interrupting the rhetorical flow. "But I'm very glad you feel so cordial toward me, Mr. Delroy."

"Yes, I do feel cordial toward you; I do indeed!" declared the other, eager to go on with his speech. "If I didn't feel that way, Hampton, I shouldn't be here this morning on the errand that has brought me. I want to ask you bluntly—and you needn't feel in the least obliged to answer me—if you have seen Exmoor."

Jerry raised his eyebrows.

"Well, yes, I have seen him," he answered slowly, and reserved further details. "I saw him yesterday afternoon."

Delroy scowled in perplexity.

"That's odd!" he exclaimed. "How late in the afternoon?"

"Why, it was rather late," replied Jerry; "it must have been as late as six o'clock."

"That's it!" cried Delroy, better satisfied; "I think that explains it. Would you mind telling me, Hampton, if you—well, did you happen to talk with the man about me, or did you by chance take my part in any argument with him?"

For the sake of getting all possible information Jerry forbore to explain that he had seen Exmoor, but had not spoken with him.

"No," he answered, "I can't say that your name was even mentioned. There was surely no argument, and I had no opportunity to take your part."

Delroy caught a favorable note in the last sentence.

"Ah, but I believe you would do so if you had the opportunity," he said.

"If I could see justice on your side, I should probably speak for it in an argument," admitted the younger man.

"That's it—justice!" cried Delroy. "I assure you, Hampton, that there is rarely any justice or right on Exmoor's side of a case. But let's not speak in abstractions. I came to talk with you most confidentially, and I don't mean to keep anything from you. Exmoor sent me a message late yesterday afternoon, by special post, and asked me to meet him at a certain place this morning at nine-thirty."

"It's nearly that now," observed Jerry, glancing at his watch.

"Yes, but the appointment was canceled this morning," Delroy explained. "He couldn't trust the mail, it seems, so he sent a private messenger to me at seven o'clock with a letter telling me to disregard the first message until I heard from him again. That was the extent of the communications; they were brief and simply worded."

Jerry pondered deeply, weighing his own position.

"You told me that Exmoor was trying to ruin you, I believe," he said at last, "and from what I saw the other night I gather that he got possession of something that gave him more power to do so."

"That comes very near to the facts," admitted the other readily.

"Then I think I see the reason for the postponement of the appointment," said Jerry. "I believe that Exmoor no longer has the papers—or whatever they were—that he took from your safe."

Delroy went from crimson to white with irrepressible excitement.

"You know that?" he cried. "How in Heaven's name do you know it, Hampton? Who has the papers if he hasn't got them? Don't drive me wild, man! Has he lost them? Who has them—"

"Give me time!" Jerry protested calmly. "The last I knew of your papers, Mr. Delroy, they were in the possession of Mr. Kingsale; that was at a late hour last night."

Delroy sat down upon a box beside the path and mopped his brow.

"From the frying-pan to the fire!" he muttered huskily. "Of the two men I think I'd sooner trust myself to Exmoor; but, believe me, Hampton, they are a pair of the devil's own."

"You must try not to agitate yourself so violently," Jerry advised; "after your temporary collapse the other night, you should be very careful. Suppose we take a walk and talk the thing over quietly?"

Delroy assented almost humbly, and they left the garden and walked around to Audubon Avenue and through the rocks and fields above Fort George.

"When we were talking of Kingsale before," said Jerry, "you seemed rather pleased than otherwise that he had appeared. You may remember that you likened yourself to a rabbit pursued by a hound and a fox."

Delroy nodded moodily. "I suppose I was talking in the air," he confessed. "I didn't expect such a rapid unfolding of developments. As a matter of fact, I didn't think Exmoor was such a consummate fool as to let Kingsale get the better of him!"

"How about young Mr. Foxford?" inquired Jerry, watching intently for the effect of this shot.

Delroy looked up sharply.

"Well, how about him?" he returned. "I am quite through with Foxford, and he doesn't enter into this case."

"He entered into it very actively, as far as Kingsale was concerned," Jerry declared; "so actively that Kingsale all but failed in his object, and—well, he might have lost his life, I fancy, through a little encounter with Foxford. His condition is now one of convalescence, I believe."

Delroy sat down again, this time selecting a rock without much attention to its contour. When he could speak he gave vent to several monosyllabic terms that had no logical bearing on the case.

"It seems," Jerry went on quietly, "that Exmoor and Foxford have formed some sort of a working alliance."

"How the devil do you know all these things, Hampton?" demanded Delroy. "Are you hand-and-glove with all these fellows, or are you one of these popular fiction detectives?"

"You will have to make a third guess," Jerry replied. "I can say only that the things I know have been virtually thrust upon me, and my eyes and ears have been wide open most of the time."

The older man got up and paced back and forth, his face working convulsively.

"It's not so much for myself that I care, Hampton," he said suddenly; "I would throw my cards on the table and take my chance on the show-down; but Eugenia's happiness is more to me than everything else in the world. There would be a scandal if I took this thing to the police—I confess that!—and you know what such things mean to a young girl. No, Hampton, I've been taking threats and insults from some of those jackals, and I'll do almost anything before I'll let Eugenia suffer."

Jerry looked at him searchingly. He suspected that this strain of pathos was another pose, but he found something of real feeling and tense emotion in the usually cold and calculating eyes, and involuntarily he softened toward the man.

"I can imagine your feelings, Mr. Del-

roy," he said solemnly. "I should find it hard to understand a man who would not sacrifice almost anything in his life for—for Miss Delroy."

The father of the lady who inspired this sudden and naive declaration of sentiment paused in his feverish pacing and looked Jerry in the eye with fierce intensity.

"Hampton!" he exclaimed, "I believe you mean every word of that! If you said it lightly there could never be anything more between us—except hate! But you are a man of high principles; I have always respected you. You are a poor man, Hampton, and a poor man is naturally diffident about certain things; but your future is in your own hands, and it couldn't be in better ones.

"I may be speaking wildly, for a father, but I am in a highly emotional state, as you know. A man is inclined to speak out from the heart when the conventions are in abeyance. If you love Eugenia, Hampton, as I firmly believe you do, take my advice, my boy, and don't risk your happiness for any passing question of pride. Perhaps I have said enough."

Jerry was flushed and ill at ease. His natural impulse was to take the man at his word and frankly open his heart to him, but second thought counseled discretion.

"I am very grateful for some of the things you have said, Mr. Delroy," he responded, "but—but I suppose we are hardly justified in saying too much under these conditions. If I were to trust myself to speak of my ambitions and hopes, it would be the lady's right to be the first to hear me."

Delroy inclined his head solemnly.

"I stand rebuked," he said. "You have a finer-drawn delicacy of feeling than I ever had, I suppose, and I honor you and envy you for it, my boy."

Jerry said no more, and he secretly hoped that the doting father would venture no deeper into the realms of sentiment.

"By Jove!" Delroy cried suddenly, "you've got me in such a mood that I was forgetting that I had an enemy in the world; and it isn't safe to overlook the two fellows we were talking about. I hate to return to the subject, but I wonder what will happen next. What is there for Exmoor to do now? I can't think of anything left for him *to* do if Kingsale holds the cards. But—believe me—he'll find a way out; I know the man!

"I wish I could know where they are, Hampton," he added ruefully. "I am helpless now, but if I had some knowledge of their maneuvering it would give me a sort of grasp of the situation."

"I wouldn't care to tell you where Exmoor is," Hampton returned frankly. "I don't feel that I have the right to do that. But it's different in the case of Kingsale; he has not given me any secret to keep, and I've no reason to feel any particular delicacy about his affairs."

He took Delroy's arm and led him to a clump of rocks just above the old fortifications, overlooking the Fort George amusement resort and Amsterdam Avenue.

"I won't point, for it might draw attention to us," he said, "but do you see an old building just to the right of that car switch—the building with the shooting gallery signs on the front?"

Delroy nodded excitedly.

"It is boarded up and apparently abandoned," Jerry continued, "but I believe that some one is living there, and Kingsale went there last night and remained there—at least until after midnight, for I watched for him to come out until that time."

"Argus!" exclaimed Delroy in amazement. "Are you everywhere at once? Do you see everything that happens?"

"I am inclined to think," said Jerry, ignoring the exclamation, "that Kingsale is staying there, for he was ill and in some distress when he went there, and in such circumstances a man would be inclined to go to the place that offered him the most secure shelter."

"I'll tell you what I would like to do, Hampton," Delroy broke in eagerly, "I'd like to send Exmoor an anonymous

letter, telling him where he may find Kingsale. Take my word for it, if he got such a letter to-day, he would be at this place to-night."

"He would probably fear a trap," Jerry remarked, entertaining the proposal speculatively.

"He might fear something of the sort," admitted the other, "but he would be here nevertheless. He's a bold man and he has courage, and he would never let slip an opportunity to get even with Kingsale."

"I don't get the idea," said Jerry. "I don't see how such an arrangement could benefit you in any way."

"It's the case of the rabbit again," explained the older man. "As long as the hound and the fox can be kept at each other, the rabbit can rest in peace. I would like to bring about such an encounter and I would like to be in a place of vantage, like this, to hear at least the echoes of the music. There might be a part for the rabbit to play, you see, when the hound and the fox were done with each other."

Jerry smiled.

"Which is the hound?" he inquired idly.

"I was only generalizing," Delroy answered, "but Kingsale is one of the lowest, most contemptible hounds I ever knew, if you want me to particularize; and there never was a slyer fox than Irving Exmoor."

"I liked him in the short time that I knew him," Jerry remarked, "but now I am almost inclined to believe you. Where, by the way, does Foxford come in, in your human zoo?"

"Foxford!" Delroy answered disgustedly, "he is an insect—a crawling parasite!"

Hampton pondered gravely.

"Well," he said presently, "I have given you the information gratuitously; it is yours to do with as you please. Perhaps—I know that it would be wiser for me to keep out of the affair—but if you want to send a message to Exmoor—I think I can find a way of getting it to him."

"You'll take it to him yourself!" Delroy exclaimed eagerly.

"No, I won't do that," Jerry said emphatically; "but I'll see that it goes to the right place."

The older man glanced at the ancient shooting gallery and his eyes gleamed again.

"I'll write a message for Exmoor," he said, "and I don't want to be far from here in case he comes to investigate."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"BUTTON, BUTTON."

AN atmosphere of vague gloom pervaded the Delroy household. Nothing had happened to disturb the sylvan quiet of Inwood since the night of the burglary, but Eugenia went out of doors with timid reluctance, and the maid servant refused to go out at all.

She kept constant watch at the kitchen window for the gray-bearded man, and on two occasions she aroused the family with false alarms.

Milton Delroy returned late in the afternoon and informed his daughter that he had spent a part of the morning very pleasantly with Jerry Hampton.

"A fine chap!" he remarked. "They call him a dreamer, an idealist, and all that sort of thing, but he has a head on his shoulders and we'll hear from him yet. I really wish we might see more of him here, Eugenia."

The girl frowned and tapped the rug with the toe of her slipper.

"I can't understand these glaring inconsistencies of yours, father," she remarked. "It was only the other day that you were calling Jerry Hampton an insolent upstart. and a dozen other things. You objected violently even to my being seen with him, and now you turn absolutely about and regret that he doesn't come here oftener."

The father waved his hands deprecatingly.

"I know, I know," he returned, "but I really haven't been myself for a long time. You must forgive me for my erratic notions, Eugenia. I was at fault in not

knowing Hampton better. Now we are the best of friends, and I know him for what he is. I am sure that you'd like him if you got better acquainted with him."

"Why, I know him quite well," she said impatiently. "I have always liked Mr. Hampton, and I would be very glad to have him come here more. But this startling change puzzles me. You refused to believe for a long while that Mr. Foxford was anything but a well-bred and agreeable man, and now you condemn him bitterly. You told me that you had reasons to fear him in a business way, but your fear has apparently been overcome. Now that you turn to Mr. Hampton and get so enthusiastic about him, it almost seems that you have found some reason to fear him, and that you want me to be nice to him on that account. I have always wanted to help you, father, and be in sympathy with all your affairs, but it seems a little hard that I should have to adapt myself to all the changes among your friends and enemies."

Delroy sighed and shrugged his shoulders with an air of feeling hurt and misunderstood.

"Well, my dear," he told her, "we'll say no more about it, and think no more about it. You are perfectly right; I should not bring my troubles and worries into my home and burden you with them. As for my having reason to fear young Hampton, that's too absurd! He knows nothing of business and our relations have been of the simplest. No, no, my dear; you must give me credit for being able to admire a man for his uprightness of character and general good qualities."

"I'm very glad that you do," said Eugenia, but her manner was still cold and it did not thaw during dinner.

Delroy left the table after gulping down his coffee and went out to the garage. Eugenia thought he had taken the car out for the evening, but in half an hour he was back again, and she heard him pacing the floor of the library in the agitation which she had marked in him so often of late.

About nine o'clock she heard the car rumble out of the garage and she called to her father and asked him if the chauffeur had permission to use it.

"It's all right," Delroy answered quickly; "I told Harry that he might go down-town. I have to go out presently to do some errands in this neighborhood, and I have a late appointment, unfortunately. Harry will pick me up down-town and bring me home."

Eugenia was surprised and disturbed.

"That will leave me and the maid alone here," she protested. "You know that we are very nervous, anyway, and—"

"I'm very sorry, Eugenia," Delroy interrupted, a trifle impatiently, "but it can't be helped this time. As a matter of fact, Harry has to do a bit of an errand for me, and that's why I let him go. I am not leaving you alone here merely that I may have the car to bring me home."

He heard the girl close her door and it irked him to think that he had undoubtedly hurt her; but he reflected that there was too much afoot for him to give thought to the minor details of the household. He continued to pace the room nervously, and at nine-thirty he put on a loose raincoat and a tweed cap, took a heavy walking-stick, and left the house quietly.

He walked rapidly down to Dyckman Street, then climbed the St. Nicholas Avenue hill to Fort George, where he took cautiously to the dark road that bordered the burned and ruined portion of the amusement park. On the crest of the hill he sat down in the grass among rocks that concealed him from chance wayfarers.

Below him he could see the shooting gallery. North of that some of the beer gardens, motion-picture theatres and sundry amusement enterprises were in half-hearted operation, bravely struggling against the decline of the summer resort which once regarded itself as a competitor of Coney Island.

A half hour passed and Delroy sat patiently and watched the scattering pedestrians, the street-cars and the occasional automobiles that passed below him. Near eleven o'clock, as he was standing erect

and stretching his cramped limbs, a motor-car came up the avenue from the south, slowed up, and stopped just below his perch.

The driver blew four short blasts on his horn, then started up again and disappeared around the Fort George circle.

Delroy chuckled softly and crept forward, feeling his way over the treacherous rocks as they led down the steep embankment. Presently he found secure lodgment upon a projecting boulder, and upon peering intently into the shadows of the west side of the avenue he discovered a man standing on the sidewalk, leaning against the wall of rock and contemplating the shooting gallery opposite.

For a long time he watched him and for a long time the man moved no more than a statue. Lights went out in the beer gardens and movie palaces, and people straggled away to their down-town homes. Delroy grew weary and lowered himself noiselessly to a sitting posture.

The man moved, but only to change his position, and time went on again. Delroy could not strike a match to look at his watch, but after an unconscionable time he calculated that it must be nearing one o'clock.

A policeman strolled down the avenue, and the waiting man crouched low in the shadows and eluded his unsuspecting eye, then resumed his position and went on with the stoical vigil. The street-cars ceased to pass except at long intervals, and the night grew so still that Delroy, thoroughly tired and chilled to the bone, heard a clock from some Bronx steeple and was not surprised when it struck twice.

All at once the man, as though acting by method rather than impulse, started forward deliberately and crossed the avenue to the shooting gallery. He stood boldly on the walk in front of it and calmly inspected its exterior, and as Delroy, leaning forward, breathlessly watched his every movement, he stepped into the dark doorway at the corner of the building and disappeared.

Delroy waited but a moment before he hastened to make the space between him and the scene of possible action less. He slid down from his rock and descended to the avenue level by a process of tumbling and sliding, then darted to the opposite side and crept cautiously to the corner doorway.

He listened for the sound of breathing, and when he felt certain that his man had gone beyond the orbit of the door, he too entered the dark vestibule and explored.

The outer door was no longer in use; it was there, but it sagged from its hinges in a dilapidated condition. Across the four or five foot vestibule, however, was a new door of stout boards. Delroy tried it and it opened readily, showing more darkness beyond.

The latch played freely and it seemed probable that the lock was in good condition and had been undone by the previous intruder with the help of one of those keys to which all locks are alike.

His reflections were brought to an end suddenly. There was the sound of a door bursting open somewhere above him, a startled cry, a confusion of excited voices, and then the clatter and rumble of an encounter amid overturning furniture.

Delroy, with his heart pounding, struck a match and saw a rickety staircase rising before him as he pushed the door open. The place and the situation were not inviting, but he had a desperate project to spur him, and he felt that for the moment the participants in the affair above were too absorbingly occupied to resent or pay much heed to an intrusion.

He tore off his long coat and dropped it at the foot of the stairs, gripped his stick, and mounted the steps resolutely.

At the top he turned a corner, guided by the unceasing noise and a dim glow of light, and in a squalid room, with its dust and grime illuminated by a smoky oil lamp, he saw three men tumbling on the floor. As he stood gasping with excitement on the threshold one of the combatants fell free and lay senseless. It was a dark-skinned, poorly dressed man whom he had never seen before.

The two others went on without heeding him. They were Exmoor and Kingsale. It was long since he had seen the latter, and Exmoor had changed his appearance since the burglary episode, but he had anticipated the recognition and it was easy.

Exmoor had a short club or blackjack in his hand, and Kingsale was struggling to wrest it from him or to hinder him from using it. Kingsale was no longer young, and his opponent was his junior by no more than ten years, but both of them fought with vigor and dash.

They floundered upon the creaking floor, hampered alike by the ruins of a broken table and some crockery and glassware, but they were careful, even in their frenzy, to avoid unnecessary noise.

All at once it seemed that the bludgeon for which they contended fulfilled its purpose. Kingsale's head fell back, his arms relaxed in their clutching embrace of his antagonist, and he became inert.

Delroy, leaning forward recklessly, saw Exmoor rise to his knees and plunge a hand eagerly into the breast pocket of the beaten man. He saw him grope frantically for an instant, then draw forth a small packet and leap to his feet with a stifled cry of satisfaction.

Delroy took another step forward, and Exmoor, turning his head at the instant, saw him.

"Delroy!" cried the man, astounded, and made a wild spring for him.

Delroy gave back a pace and his heavy stick descended upon Exmoor's head, felling him. In a flash the packet changed hands again, and the new possessor whirled and darted for the stairs.

But he reckoned without the dark-skinned, hard-headed man who had been out of the combat so long. The latter rolled over at an inopportune moment for Delroy, vaguely sensed the new conditions, and caught his leg in an inextricable grip.

Taken utterly unawares, Delroy reeled and fell heavily, crying out and struggling fiercely, and holding tenaciously to the packet. But the stranger was more than a match for him; a laboring man, evidently, with stout limbs and whipcord muscles. In a moment he had Delroy subdued and was sitting on his chest, and in another moment he had twisted the coveted packet from his hand.

A step sounded on the stair, and both men stopped, panting for breath, and listened. Some one was hurrying to the room and as they waited there came the sound of yet another arrival.

"Beat it!" cried a thick, angry voice; "What yer doing here? Get out!"

Some one leaped half way up the stairs, there was a sharp, desperate scuffle, and then a body bumped down the steps and thudded at the bottom.

A man darted into the room. Delroy, terrified and defeated, turned his head by a frantic effort and looked. The man was young Foxford, and he stood blinking in amazement at the extraordinary scene.

"Hello, Delroy!" he exclaimed suddenly; "how are you? You don't look happy!"

Exmoor, drifting back to consciousness, stirred and raised his head. Foxford saw him for the first time.

"The devil!" he cried. "What's this?"

He glanced in fresh bewilderment at the dark-skinned man and at the fallen Kingsdale, then caught up a chair and turned upon Delroy's captor.

"What's that in your hand?" he demanded, sighting the packet. "Drop it!"

There was a barely audible sound behind him, and he whipped around and saw Harry, the Delroy chauffeur, creeping upon him. Swinging the chair over his shoulder, he backed away, and Delroy and the dark man, suddenly uniting against a common enemy, sprang up and attacked him from the rear.

"Hands up—everybody!" came a command, in a shrill, strained voice, and they turned sharply and saw Kingsale sitting up and brandishing a revolver.

The chauffeur, in his maneuvers against Foxford, had drawn near the shelf on which the flickering lamp rested.

"The light, Harry!" yelled Delroy.

The chauffeur caught the inspiration instantly. In defiance of the threatening

weapon, he whirled and swept the lamp from the shelf with a swing of his arm. It crashed on the floor and went out, and in the black darkness there was a writhing, cursing tangle of six men in various states of consciousness and fighting efficiency.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOOPING THE DIP.

THREE factions strove in the darkness for supremacy; three pairs of men, and each pair battling with impartial ferocity against the two others.

"Keengsell!" yelled a voice that was easily recognized as that of the dark man, "dey get da pape!—get da pape outa my han'!"

The voice of Kingsale, grown stronger, rose above the turmoil and cursed the poor fellow who so honestly confessed his dereliction.

"I've got it, Exmoor!" shouted Foxford, barely making himself heard. "Now beat it!"

"I'm covering the door!" cried Kingsale; "if any one tries to pass me I'll shoot."

There was a lull in the uproar. Exmoor and Foxford were maneuvering to gain the exit without precipitating a rush, and the others were groping for them.

There was a sudden sharp scuffle.

"Here, Harry! I've got 'em!" declared Delroy. "Over here! Come!"

A concerted dash followed the announcement, and in the mêlee a pair of hands found Delroy's throat. He gurgled and strangled, but fought so desperately with his assailant that he extricated himself.

"Help me, Exmoor!" yelled Foxford; "they're getting it away!"

A random fist, smiting anything that offered resistance to a blow, caught Delroy in the neck and all but paralyzed him. He was losing courage now; the Stygian blackness, the groping unknown hands, were too much for him. Some one tackled him about the knees and threw him, and his terror broke loose.

"Help! Help!" he yelled, putting all his remaining energy into the call. "Help! Murder!"

The swinging door banged against the wall. The six combatants sensed a seventh person in the room.

"The police are coming!" cried a new voice, and at least two of the men recognized it as Jerry Hampton's.

A match flared in the blackness, and they saw Hampton standing in the doorway, pointing a warning finger at the stairs. In the hush that came upon them they heard running feet on the pavement outside. A patrolman's whistle shrilled a block or two away.

Jerry struck another match, and the dark-skinned man rushed to the rear of the room and threw open a trap-door.

"Down here!" he cried hoarsely; "out da back door!"

Panic seized them. All striving for the precious packet was abandoned, and every man fought to get down the narrow ladder that could be seen dimly through the trap.

The dark-skinned man had the start of the others, and he was the first to disappear through the rectangular hole. Delroy, although he had called for aid, and the police had responded, was no longer desirous of meeting the rescuers, and he jumped for the ladder simultaneously with Foxford.

They became wedged for a moment in the aperture, and in their panic they slapped and pummeled each other without reason until both fell through and tumbled to the floor below. Delroy groaned and cursed every one impartially, and his groans turned to howls as the descending Exmoor used him as a landing cushion, and was followed instantly by Kingsale, who was still feeble as a result of the battle.

The proverbially ponderous feet of the policemen were thundering on the stairs as Jerry Hampton and the chauffeur slid down the ladder, and Jerry, going last,

had the presence of mind to close the trap above him.

The dark-skinned man had now opened a rear door, which gave directly upon the steep descent to the Speedway and the river. Shreds of light from the Speedway lamps filtered in through the trees, and with this slight advantage the fugitives pulled themselves together after a fashion and stole out with a cautious regard for the chances of immediate pursuit.

A man sat on the floor near the door as Jerry started to leave, and a ray of light showed that it was Delroy.

"Are you coming?" Jerry whispered, "or don't you mind being found here by the police?"

"I think my ankle is broken," moaned the man. "What the devil I ever let myself into such a scrape for is more than I can tell! What are you doing here?"

"Come on!" Jerry ordered peremptorily. "They're at the trap now; if you're caught you'll have to explain why you were here and why you were in such a Donnybrook row. Such publicity would be pleasant for your daughter, wouldn't it?"

He caught Delroy by the arm and lifted him to his feet. Limping painfully and groaning, the older man suffered himself to be dragged through the door and out upon a steep bank which afforded but perilous footing in the dark.

Loud voices sounded from the upper floor of the building, doors banged and at last the deliberate investigators found the trap and could be heard descending the ladder.

"Run!" ordered Jerry, and scrambled down the bank, pulling Delroy along despite his protests.

They blundered through tall weeds and brush, and came upon a rambling structure of timber framework to the northeast of the building they had left. Jerry forced his charge to climb over a part of the obstruction, and they realized presently that they were more or less trapped in the scaffolding of a small "scenic railway."

It started, evidently, above them at the level of the avenue, and the tracks were laid in loops and "dips" over a considerable area of the hillside.

Jerry investigated a large object that loomed vaguely a few feet away and discovered that it was one of the three-seated cars that are commonly used upon such contrivances. It was tied for the night to the side-rail of the track, and with sudden inspiration he undid the rope and found that the car moved forward when he pushed it.

"Into it!" he cried, and hauled the unwilling Delroy after him into the rear seat. There was a brake there, to be used by the operator, and he loosened it and gave the car a shove by kicking against the supports of the side-rail.

The effect was startling. The car glided smoothly for a few feet, then tilted downward at an alarming angle and plunged into a pit of blackness. Jerry clung to the swaying, terrified Delroy, and braced his feet against the seat in front.

The car reached the bottom of the dip, then soared upward with a dizzy swoop. It played fast and loose with the law of gravity, cut figures-of-eight, threw the passengers forward as though to pitch them out, then snapped backward till their bones cracked.

Jerry did some quick thinking. The car would doubtless stop finally close to the exit of the structure on Amsterdam Avenue—the place of all others at which they did not wish to land.

The car plunged again toward the depths, and he made a guess that they were on the last round of the nerve-shattering trip. He caught the brake lever with his right hand, still clinging to Delroy with the other, and made ready to test its efficacy.

The car bounded over a sickening "thank-ye-ma'am," and careened around a curve that lay among brush and tree branches near the bottom of the hill, and he saw their pursuers hastening down the hill to the left, searching the path with a flash-lamp. Instantly he took a chance

and applied the brake, and the vehicle creaked, strained and slowed gradually to a stop at the beginning of another upward swoop.

"Now, you've got to jump!" he said softly but firmly, and before Delroy could utter the objections that rushed to his lips, he had him through the railing, and dropped with him ten feet into weeds and shrubbery which tore and scratched, but did not break bones.

They had been scorching over the crazy railway for perhaps three minutes, and it seemed ridiculous in view of their predicament, but they had traversed a difficult area and landed near the Speedway, which they might not have reached at all if they had trusted to the dark and dangerous path with its rocks and unknown pitfalls.

Delroy had ceased to groan and protest. It appeared that he scarcely regarded himself any longer as of this world. He obeyed his guide's every command dumbly as they sped through the shrubbery, and Jerry was whimsically amused to see that his lameness was forgotten.

The police had heard the rattle of the car on the wooden rails and were evidently mystified. Their light was now bobbing about and throwing shadows among the skeleton ribs and braces of the structure, and they seemed in no desperate hurry to find the trail of the fugitives or to follow it.

"The Speedway to Dyckman Street!" Jerry gasped in the other's ear, "and then the open lots toward the river! We can shake them off there, if they follow us."

Running as noiselessly as they could manage, they found a winding road and took it thankfully; but as they neared the main avenue a locked gate barred the way. Jerry seized Delroy in his arms and swung him over the barrier, then leaped after him and ran him down the grassy slope to the Speedway.

The great sweeping boulevard, lighted at intervals, was as desolate as the Arizona desert, and the two men ran without fear of hindrance, keeping to the sidewalk, which was for the most part in the deep shadow of the thickly wooded hill.

"Ev—ryone—got away!" panted Delroy, showing symptoms of returning spirit.

"We are *getting* away," Jerry corrected; "it's not time to boast about it yet."

"Th—think—they'll keep—after us?"

"Don't try to talk," said Jerry; "you've no breath to spare. I don't think they are trying very hard. Fights around that section are no very uncommon thing. They'll give it up, probably, and be glad to get rid of the trouble."

Suddenly he grasped Delroy's arm and stopped him. Delroy, startled, opened his mouth to speak, but Jerry gave him a warning shake and pointed to a park bench in the shadow beside the walk.

Delroy leaned forward and peered anxiously at the spot, and as Jerry took a step ahead a man sprang up from behind the bench and started running across the boulevard. At the curb his toe was caught by an unseen obstacle and he measured his length in the soft gravel.

Before Jerry could anticipate such a movement, Delroy, with astonishing spirit, flung himself forward and landed on top of the fellow.

"It's Foxford!" he cried excitedly; "I've got him!"

But Foxford was of a different mind. In spite of Delroy's weight upon him, holding him prone for an instant, he writhed into a position from which he could grapple with the older man, and at once the unfinished battle of the dark house was resumed by two of the former participants.

Hampton was amazed and indignant, but still he could not resist the farcical appeal of the situation. It was highly suggestive of one of the old slap-stick pantomimes—this long series of "alarums and excursions" in which every man seemed to go at fisticuffs with almost any one within reach.

He made sure that no policemen or other stranger was in sight, then stood near the rough-and-tumble and became a silent witness. Delroy had brought it on himself, and Jerry was not disposed to interfere.

Presently it seemed that the men were intent on rending each other's garments. Delroy ripped Foxford's collar and shirt open in what appeared to be an effort to get at his inside pockets, and he took a deal of punishment during the operation, so intent was he upon his object. Presently Foxford took advantage of his carelessness of defense and got a crushing grip upon his throat.

There was a gasp and a gurgle, and Delroy began struggling frantically.

"That'll do!" cried Jerry. "Let him up."

Foxford expressed a disinclination to obey in forceful terms.

Jerry said no more, but sprang upon the struggling heap and became a third party to the scrimmage. Foxford met him with a blow aimed at the jaw, but Jerry guarded and countered to the same objective with more success.

Foxford let go of Delroy altogether and grappled with the new foe. They rolled over and over in the gravel, while Delroy recovered himself and strove valiantly to aid his ally.

A sharp whistle sounded out of the darkness to the south, and was repeated twice at intervals of some ten seconds. Foxford made a supreme effort and freed himself from his opponent, and before Jerry could spring to his feet he was off like a shot, running in the direction of the whistle.

"After him—quick!" cried Delroy. "He's got it, and he'll get away."

"Wait—stop!" ordered Hampton, but Delroy was off, making southward at an unbelievable clip, at the risk of running into the arms of the police.

Jerry stood still for a moment, putting his disordered attire to right and reflecting on his part in the comedy with mingled anger and amusement.

Down the boulevard, where the two men had just disappeared, somebody cried out shrilly, but the cry was cut short as though the person who uttered it was stricken at the moment.

"There's no end to the thing!" exclaimed Hampton, and started running toward the new theatre of war.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAY OF DAWN.

HAMPTON kept a sharp watch ahead for trouble as he neared the scene of the recent escape from the shooting gallery, but the broad stretches of lawn to the right of the walk were quiet and nothing happened to check him. The towering Washington Bridge, spanning the Harlem River at One Hundred and Eighty-First Street loomed above him, and as he ran down the grade where the path curves under the supports of the bridge, he all but stumbled upon the motionless form of Delroy.

A hurried examination showed that the man had been knocked out by a blow on the head, probably struck with a blackjack. There was no abrasion, such as a club would have made, but a rising welt indicated the nature of the attack.

Jerry picked him up and laid him on one of the benches at the side of the path. He slid down the grassy bank to the water's edge and filled his cap with water. It ran through the soft cloth rapidly, but there was enough left to throw in the man's face and to cool his throbbing head for a moment.

Three times Jerry filled the cap, and the last cold dash brought a gasp and a protesting wriggle from the patient.

Presently Delroy sat up and tried to get on his feet.

"Hold hard!" exclaimed Jerry. "You're not going on any more chases to-night, you know. I didn't think that an ordinary man could go through so many knock-outs and recoveries in one day."

Delroy sighed heavily and leaned back on the bench.

"They—they jumped on me unexpectedly," he said weakly, "but I saw them—Kingsale and that foreign-looking fellow!"

"Great gods!" cried Jerry, "are they all at it still? What became of Foxford?"

"I didn't see him again," answered Delroy dejectedly. "He must have got away, unless those devils laid him out, too. That's it, Hampton!" he added excitedly: "they were waiting here, and they got him before they got me. You know what that means; they've got the packet now, and perhaps Foxford is at the bottom of the river."

"It's too much for me!" sighed Jerry, and sat down wearily on the end of the bench. "See, it's growing light," he remarked, pointing to the sky over the Bronx shore. "You have made a long night of it, and a busy one! I can hardly figure how so many of you managed to come together at once. I was surprised, above all, when I saw your chauffeur taking so active a part. I had an idea that he was not especially clever and that you had little confidence in him."

"I suppose I was a fool to ring him in!" Delroy muttered, "but he didn't do so badly after all. I needed somebody to help me, and I could think of no one else for such a job, so I offered him a thousand dollars if he succeeded personally in getting back the packet that was stolen from my safe. From what I saw of him in the scrimmage, I guess he did his best."

"I think you'll agree with me that your appearance is not very well suited to daylight," said Jerry, "so, if you're able now, we'll take the steps to the street and try to get a taxi."

Delroy nodded and got up.

"I must say, on that subject, that your own face needs washing, and a change of clothing would improve your looks quite a bit," he returned, with a rueful attempt at humor. "Yes, I think I'll go home now, and if you care to escort me there, Hampton, I shall be still further in your obligation."

He walked unsteadily and complained testily of his injured head, but Jerry supported him and they slowly climbed the stone steps to the bridge and made their way guardedly to Amsterdam avenue without encountering any more observing citizens than a few chattering foreign laborers who were already marching to their work.

At Audubon Avenue a drowsy policeman stood on the corner and contemplated their approach with a cynical eye.

"You guys must 'a' been havin' a grand time," he remarked.

Jerry gave him a portentous wink.

"They have *real* parties over in the Bronx," he said, affecting the mock enthusiasm of a blasé rounder.

The patrolman sniffed disdainfully.

"We'd 'a' run yer in over here, before yer got very far," he declared, with the typical assumption of Washington Heights superiority.

At the cab stand on the St. Nicholas Avenue corner there was no taxi to be had at that hour of the morning, but presently one came speding around the corner, having doubtless left a late fare in the Fort Washington section, and Jerry sprang into the street and hailed it. The chauffeur smiled as Delroy was bundled in, but Jerry offered no explanation of their appearance as he gave him directions.

"Did you have your own car out last night?" Jerry inquired casually, as they were settled in the cab and running west to Broadway.

"Yes, I did," was the answer, given with some indifference. "I don't know where Harry left it when he came to that shooting gallery, but I suppose he got it again and is home with it by this time. He has a good pair of legs and he was going strong when I saw him leaving the building."

"If he went home," said Jerry anxiously, "I hope he didn't wake Miss Delroy and report that you were missing. I suppose you will keep the night's work dark."

"He wouldn't give anything away," Delroy said confidently. "Yes, I hope that almost everything can be kept dark; but I shall have to make excuses of some sort for the condition that I'm in, and I shall have to invent some means of persuading Eugenia to pack and go away with me on an early train."

"Go away!" Jerry exclaimed.

The other nodded gravely.

"It's now about six o'clock," he said "and I intend to be out of the city by ten. If ever a man needed a change of air and scene I do!"

"If you had recovered your packet," said Jerry thoughtfully, "you would not have had to go, I suppose?"

Delroy shook his head.

"That would have put a new face on things," he admitted. "As it is, you see, I am worse off by far than I was before. When the possession of—of the contents of the packet lay between Exmoor and Kingsale, I knew what to expect; now, I don't know who has the packet and I don't know what use may be made of it. It is absolute hell for me, Hampton!"

"I dare say there is such a thing," Jerry reflected aloud, "as a man having circumstances so shaped around him that he is in constant dread of some evil and yet has a comparatively clear conscience."

The older man's face brightened perceptibly.

"It would be hard for some people to see that," he responded, "but it's so. And that is my case precisely."

He was so earnest that Jerry was moved for the moment to a certain credulity and sympathy.

"It's a pity," he remarked, "that such miserable affairs can't be cleared up in a straightforward, fearless way. It's all a matter of fear, of course—most evils are. If you forgot your pride and your dread of public opinion, and forced the thing to an issue yourself, then it would be all over in a short time and you could sleep nights and welcome the days again. It's dread of something that never comes that drives a man mad."

Delroy inclined his head sorrowfully.

"The theory is perfect, Hampton," he said brokenly, "but it takes a strong man to put it into action. They've been breaking me down for years; I'm not a strong man, you see."

The cab had climbed the Prescott Avenue hill, and as it turned into the winding ways at the summit the chauffeur looked back through the window for instructions.

Jerry pointed ahead at the house, and a moment later they stopped at the door.

"The garage is open and the car is not in yet!" Delroy exclaimed, as he got out.

Jerry uttered a sudden gasp of dismay.

"Your house is open, too!" he cried. "See, the door is ajar."

Delroy was startled, but he controlled himself.

"I dare say it's all right," he murmured. "Eugenia has probably discovered that I've been out all night, and she is watching for me to administer discipline. And then, she sometimes takes her morning walk as early as this."

"Wait for me," Jerry said to the chauffeur, and took Delroy's arm to help him up the path. "I'll stay until you see that everything is in order," he explained.

As they pushed the swinging door open and entered the house, the sound of sobbing came to their ears and they paused in the hall.

"I say, what's the matter up there!" called Delroy, affecting a tone of solicitous good humor and smiling at the anxious Hampton.

A fresh burst of sobbing answered the call, followed by a wail of positive anguish.

"That is not Miss Delroy!" Jerry declared tensely.

Delroy's face grew suddenly drawn and white.

"No," he said huskily, "that is Ann, the maid."

He went hurriedly up the stairs, and Jerry heard him open a door.

"My daughter is not here!" he cried, calling down. "Come up, Hampton; I can't understand this."

The maid recognizing his voice, fell to pounding upon the door of her room.

"She's locked in!" exclaimed Jerry, as he reached the upper hall, and without consulting the master of the house he flung himself against the door and burst it open.

Ann, the maid servant, stood in the middle of the room, red eyed and disheveled.

"Miss Eugenia's gone, Mr. Delroy!" she wailed. "A man came here 'bout five o'clock—jus' as 'twas gettin' light—an' that Harry brought 'im in the car. They made Miss Eugenia go away with 'em."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FUGITIVE HOUSE.

AT the first shock Delroy was too overcome to speak or act, but Hampton, forcing himself to keep calm, got the story from the maid by degrees.

The chauffeur—whom Ann had always regarded with respectable suspicion—rang the door-bell just before daybreak, and she and Eugenia had dressed hurriedly and gone down to the door. Harry and a rather good-looking man with a mustache had fairly forced their way in, despite objections, and Harry informed Miss Eugenia that her father had sent him for her and that she must dress and come with him at once.

Eugenia gave no consideration to the lie, but ordered the men from the house, whereat the stranger talked with her aside long and earnestly, and reduced her to a state of hysteria and terror.

"Some of his damnable threats!" muttered Delroy, at this point. "It was Exmoor, of course."

At last Eugenia, weeping violently, had gone to her room and put on a street dress and hat. She had come back to the hall with a bag packed for traveling, it seemed, and Harry and the stranger hurried her out to the automobile and drove away with her.

"This is more than I can stand!" cried Delroy, and covered his face with his hands.

"It's no time for despair!" said Jerry sharply. "They have a good hour's start of us, and we shouldn't be losing time here by talking."

He pulled Delroy from the chair into which he had dropped, and fairly ran him down the stairs and out to the waiting taxicab.

"We're in a hurry now," he said to the chauffeur. "Go down to Dyckman Street, and up to Two Hundred and Seventh, then over toward the river. Make it as fast as you can."

"The river!" exclaimed Delroy. "What are you going there for?"

"To see if Exmoor is aboard his house-boat," answered Jerry.

Delroy's eyes glittered.

"I wish you could have told me where to find him yesterday," he said bitterly. "Things might be different now. You went there and saw him, I suppose, when you delivered my message about the shooting gallery?"

"I told you that I wasn't going myself, and I didn't go," returned Jerry. "I sent my gardener, Denny, with the letter. I have seen the house-boat, however, and I know that Exmoor has been living on it."

"He won't be there now!" declared Delroy. "He would be afraid that you would tell."

"As for that," replied Jerry, "I hardly think that he suspects me of knowing where he has been. He doesn't know that I have been there and seen the boat, so far as I know, and Denny didn't go to the boat with the letter; he sent a boy with it in a small boat from the shore.

"Stop here!" he called to the chauffeur, as the speeding car whirled around the corner of Two Hundred and Seventh Street and was half-way to the river.

He hauled Delroy out of the cab as it slowed down, and together they hurried toward the river bank.

"Which one?" inquired the older man breathlessly, as he saw the several house-boats that made up a little community.

"Wait a minute; I'll show you," answered Jerry. "It's the only one in commission just now, and—"

He stopped short, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, as they reached a point from which a clear view could be obtained.

"It's gone!" he cried, aghast. "Delroy, the boat is gone!"

The older man clapped his hands to his head.

"Oh, we might have known it!" he wailed. "The man is too shrewd to be caught napping."

"But you can't start up a house-boat at a moment's notice, as you would a racing launch!" Jerry protested. "It has to be towed from place to place, you know; and it moves slowly."

On sudden impulse he started and ran along the shore, followed by his companion, and knocked at the door of the big house-boat that was drawn up on the land.

He had improved his appearance in a measure while in the taxi, and the pleasant-faced woman who had welcomed him on the occasion of his adventure with Kingsale was no less cordial when she came to the door. She was busy with preparations for breakfast and her sleeves were rolled to the elbow, but she courteously invited the two men in.

Jerry demurred politely.

"We came up here," he said, "to pay an early call on the gentleman that occupied the house-boat just off shore, but the boat is gone. I thought you might be able to tell us something about it."

From the woman's manner it was evident that she was not in Exmoor's confidence, and she appeared eager to give information.

"I own some of these house-boats and rent them for the season," she said, "but that gentleman came here in the boat and got leave to anchor here; that's all. I never saw much of him, and I didn't happen to hear who he was. He used to come and go, sort of irregular; sometimes he'd be away from his boat for two or three days. After a while a young gentleman came and stayed with him."

"Yes, I know that," interjected Jerry. "I thought you might be able to tell me when the boat was taken away."

"Oh, it was towed away early this morning; the sun had scarcely risen," she answered readily. "If I hadn't been up earlier than usual, I shouldn't have known anything about it. I heard an automobile up on the street, and when I looked out I saw the two gentlemen and a lady come down and go out to the house-boat in the gentleman's little boat. Right away after that—so soon that I hadn't stopped looking—a good-sized motor-boat came up the river, hitched on and towed 'em away. I guess they had it engaged all ready to do the job."

"They went up the Hudson, I suppose?" queried Jerry, trying to conceal his agitation.

"Oh, no, they didn't," said the woman. "Seems they were headed for the Sound—round City Island, or somewhere like that, I guess. The motor-boat took 'em away in pretty good shape, and they went right down under the bridge."

"I would like to overtake them if I could," announced Jerry calmly. "I can run an ordinary motor-boat myself. I wonder if I could hire one around here anywhere?"

"There's our old one, right there at the landing," she said quickly. "If you can run it all right yourself, it'll only be two dollars an hour. I'll send my son out to fill the tank right away."

Delroy produced some money and they paid her in advance for three hours; then, while the young man made the boat ready they went back and dismissed the taxicab.

Delroy was a trifle timorous about embarking on such an expedition, but when Jerry swung out from the landing in good form and started down the river at a lively clip he was reassured.

They were silent for the most part, Delroy sitting in the stern and scanning the stream ahead, while Jerry devoted himself to the motor and tiller. They flew under the bridges and dodged the scows and barges of the river traffic without curtailing their speed.

"What chance have we of catching them?" Delroy asked dully, after a long silence.

"Every chance," Jerry replied, "unless they pull into some dock and conceal the boat. No matter how fast their motor craft is, the house-boat can't be made to give up her resistance any more than any scow."

In the midst of the Harlem waterfronts progress was slower. Lumber barges cluttered the draws at the bridges and the motor and rudder had to be handled with nice precision. A tug towing a heavily laden barge out of the dock stood across their way, and Jerry was forced to stop and back.

When the stern of the barge cleared his bows he flung the little craft forward again and looked eagerly for an open way ahead. As he looked his eyes widened and stared half incredulously.

"There she is!" he cried.

Delroy leaned forward, trembling with excitement, and saw the floating cottage moving majestically ahead of them some two hundred yards while the stout little motor-boat that was towing it puffed and spluttered in a vain frenzy to get ahead.

Jerry ran his boat at top speed till he was alongside, then stopped and drifted. He and Delroy frankly scanned the narrow decks at close range, but there was no sign of life from bows to stern.

A fat fellow in overalls sat in the tow-boat minding his engine, but he did no more than cast an indifferent glance at the strangers.

"I don't see their small boat anywhere," remarked Jerry. "They must have taken it in, or else they have gone ashore again at some point."

"Can't we find out for certain?" asked Delroy impatiently.

Jerry nodded gravely, and let his boat drop astern of the house-boat; then he pressed forward again and gently bumped the stern in the middle, quite out of sight of the man in the tow-boat. He sprang forward to the high rail and flung a rope over a cleat securely.

"Stay here till I call you," he said.

Jerry scrambled hastily to the wide space under the awning and began to reconnoiter the deck. Presently he made a sign to Delroy for continued silence and disappeared into the cabin.

He was gone so long that Delroy became uneasy, but when he reappeared he shook his head in a dispirited manner.

"There's not a soul aboard," he said in a low voice. "They have taken all their baggage and personal property."

Without waiting for directions Delroy clambered aboard, and the two explored the boat in every part, but with no more satisfaction.

"What was the game, anyway?" asked the older man dejectedly.

"Apparently an elaborate scheme to throw us off the track," was the answer. "They evidently went ashore somewhere in Harlem, and they may have taken a train at the Harlem station of the New York Central. Exmoor doubtless felt sure that the boat would be watched, so he made the elaborate preparations to give you or the police a false clue to work on while he made his escape."

"What is there left for us to do?" groaned Delroy.

Jerry shook his head.

"I am no detective; I can't tell you," he said.

But as Delroy started to return to the small boat he restrained him impulsively and began a new search.

The interior of the house-boat resembled an apartment that has been vacated. Scraps of waste paper and sundry discarded articles lay upon the floor, and Jerry examined every one of them with minute care. He opened a desk that was built into the wall and searched the pigeonholes and small drawers.

As he pulled out a drawer just above the pen-rack a crumpled paper fell from it. It had slipped over the side of the drawer and been jammed between the two wooden surfaces.

Jerry smoothed it out and inspected it with the same care he had given to everything else, somewhat to the disgust of the impatient Delroy.

Presently he passed the paper to his companion.

"What would you make of that?" he asked.

It was a receipt for the payment of rent, made out in the customary form, and it showed that "Mr. L. J. Ford" had con-

tracted for an apartment on Haven Avenue two days prior to the present date.

"The name suggests Foxford," observed Hampton.

Delroy nodded.

"Is this another subtle blind?" he asked, "or have we discovered some tell-tale evidence? Do you think they would dare to go back to Washington Heights and occupy an apartment?"

"It is considered the height of strategy to establish your hiding place in the enemy's midst," was the answer. "They would feel fairly safe on Washington Heights while we were chasing house-boats or watching the railroads, I think. This receipt, by the way, did not seem like a deliberate 'plant'; I believe that it was inadvertently lost, and probably has not been missed."

"We can at least go to this apartment," Delroy muttered dubiously.

"Of course, we shall go to it," returned Jerry. "I haven't asked you what their reasons might be for kidnaping Miss Delroy, but I surmise that she is held as a sort of hostage. If neither Exmoor nor Foxford has your packet, then they may think that you have recovered it, and they will demand it for the return of your daughter."

"That might possibly be the case," said Delroy doubtfully, "but I have a different theory. Unless Kingsale and his accomplice got the packet from Foxford last night Foxford still has it. It can't do him very much good, but if he obtained it for Exmoor, then he will have to be rewarded. Do you see? Foxford has been infatuated with Eugenia, and Exmoor, believing that he has me in his power, has magnificently given Eugenia to the man as his reward. Believe me, Hampton, he is capable of such an outrage!"

Jerry's face was white and set. He stared at Delroy for a moment, then took the crumpled paper from him without a word and hurried back to the motorboat trailing behind.

They got in silently and Jerry cast off and took his seat at the motor.

"What's the first move, Hampton?" Delroy asked hoarsely.

"Land at the nearest wharf," said Jerry tersely, "and take the shortest route to that apartment."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONSCIENCELESS HARRY.

AS Hampton and Delroy discussed their plans deliberately certain changes were agreed upon. Instead of making straight for the Haven Avenue apartment they took a taxi from One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street to Inwood and stopped at the Delroy house long enough to remove from their clothing all signs of the previous night's affair and effect a change of linen. Then they armed themselves with revolvers and went in the taxi to the corner of Fort Washington Avenue and One Hundred and Eighty-First Street.

It was well along in the afternoon by that time, and there were many pedestrians abroad, but they had no fear of meeting the fugitives so early in the game, and they walked openly down Fort Washington Avenue to One Hundred and Seventy-Ninth Street, then passed through to Haven Avenue and took observations.

The house corresponding to the address upon the receipt was a new six-story apartment building of pretentious appearance.

"The receipt designates the apartment as Number Fifty-One," said Jerry, "and that means, in most cases, that it is on the fifth floor."

As Delroy started to speak Jerry abruptly linked arms with him, whirled him about and guided him hurriedly around the corner.

"What's the matter now?" demanded the older man nervously.

"Two acquaintances of ours are coming up the avenue," said Jerry; "Kingsale and his evil-looking accomplice. We are not the only ones to watch the house, it seems."

"But how would they get any clue to it?" asked Delroy, bewildered. "Surely, they didn't leave telltale scraps of paper for every one to find!"

Jerry shrugged wearily.

"Mysteries no longer stagger me," he said; "they are the order of the day. But I want to get a look at those fellows; they must have stopped, or they would have passed the corner before this. Come!"

They stole cautiously to the corner and peered around it, and they saw the other two men half concealed in a doorway directly opposite the one under such general observation.

"That puts a stay on our proceedings," observed Hampton. "We can't very well make an attack on the place while they are there without precipitating action that might be bad for us."

Delroy agreed.

"I can't imagine where Kingsale picked up such a villainous accomplice," he said idly.

"Probably during the period of his spying upon your house and mine," Jerry suggested. "I think that the man lived in that shooting gallery, and Kingsale, for some reason, got lodgings with him. I saw the man first when I was watching Exmoor's boat, and he guided Kingsale to it. So it's evident that he was employed as a spy. He is probably acquainted with all the desperate characters along the water-front, and he was just the man to ferret out Exmoor's hiding place for his employer."

They waited for a time where they were, peering around the corner at intervals to make sure that the men were still there.

"Suppose we run around the block," suggested Jerry suddenly, "and come through the street below? I noticed an apartment house on that corner that is still under construction, and if there's a watchman there he is probably sauntering around outside. If we can slip in and get up to the roof, we may be able to jump to the roof of *our* apartment, and in most of these houses the roof doors are left open during the daytime."

Delroy shook his head dubiously, but Jerry had started at a fast walk and it was too late to object. When they arrived at the corner of Haven Avenue again Kingsale and the dark-skinned man were still at their post of observation.

"There's the watchman, as I hoped," Jerry whispered, pointing to a portly figure poised on the curb in front of the building, "and here is a side door. Come on!"

He dragged the weary Delroy into the gloomy interior of the new building, which smelled strongly of plaster and fresh wood, and they went up a precarious temporary stairway. There were five flights of the stairs and the older man had to stop and rest at intervals, as he was now suffering acutely from the strain of the previous night.

When they gained the roof, however, by climbing a rickety ladder through a trap, their spirits soared once more, for there was an easy drop of some four feet to the next roof, and they could see a scuttle standing open invitingly.

A moment later they were creeping down a steel staircase to the fifth floor of the middle house on that block.

"Look!" Jerry exclaimed, with satisfaction, "there is your apartment, Number Fifty-One."

The other drew back, startled, and on consultation they decided to return to the sixth floor and wait there till they were ready for action.

The day was waning, and it grew dusky in the halls. They were prepared for action, but Jerry decided that they should wait for some one to enter or leave the apartment before they made their advance.

They sat on the upper flight of stairs till six o'clock, and grew restive and doubtful. Then a door opened and closed.

Jerry darted down the stairs on tip-toe and leaned recklessly over the railing at the middle landing to see who was ringing the bell for the passenger elevator.

He was back at Delroy's side in an instant, breathing hard with excitement.

"It's Foxford!" he whispered, "and he's going out."

The elevator rose to the fifth floor, the door clattered, and the car descended. A second later there was a faint, scarcely audible sound of stealthy footsteps on the stairs. Some one was coming up who did not want to be observed by the elevator operator.

Delroy and Hampton crept down to the landing and waited, and presently, in the half light, they saw Kingsale and his accomplice appear before the door of No. 51.

As though by careful arrangement, the door opened softly at the moment of their arrival, and a man stood on the threshold with finger on lips and drew them quietly inside. And the man who received them thus was Harry, the chauffeur.

Delroy swore vehemently.

"Harry," remarked Jerry quietly, "does not believe in carrying all his eggs in one basket. A man who serves three masters equally, each one against the others, has a chance of coming out partly right at the end."

"What next!" exclaimed Delroy despondently.

Jerry chose to accept the question with a different meaning.

"Why, I think that the party will soon be in full swing," he said, "and we might as well announce our arrival. Perhaps the impartial Harry will be ready to do something for us.

"What do you say, Delroy," he added thoughtfully, "to your going in first? Ring the bell, and probably Harry will come to the door. Offer him some money and see if he will take it. I think he'll let you in unannounced for ten dollars. Then, if you are quick and careful, you can press the release-catch in the lock as you enter, and I can get in after you without troubling Harry. I won't be far from you, at any rate."

Delroy thought it over for a moment, and agreed.

"But I warn you, Hampton," he added, "that I'm too unstrung to stand very much. I think it would be no difficult matter for me to shoot a man to-day."

"Give me your gun, then!" Jerry ordered sharply. "If there has to be any shooting, I'll be on hand."

The older man looked bewildered and doubtful, but he gave up the weapon obediently and Jerry put it in his coat-pocket.

A moment later Delroy squared his shoulders resolutely, stepped to the door, and touched the bell.

A voice was heard from within uttering a startled exclamation. Then there was a long silence. Delroy touched the bell again, and after a long wait the door opened slightly and Harry applied one eye to the narrow aperture.

Delroy acted with more ingenuity than Jerry had expected. He placed his finger on his lips for silence and held out a twenty-dollar note, at the same time beckoning to Harry to step outside the door.

The chauffeur pondered the case a moment, then stepped out timidly.

"What do you want here, Mr. Delroy?" he demanded.

His ex-employer affected an engaging smile.

"I want you to return to my service, Harry," he said in a low voice. "Believe me, it will pay you best in the end. I have the whip hand of all those people you are juggling with."

He slipped the bank note into the fellow's fingers and Harry regarded it with eyes which could light up equally for a dime or a double eagle.

"I want to go into that apartment unannounced, Harry," continued Delroy, "and I have an idea that you can arrange it, just as you did for two other men a few minutes ago."

The chauffeur stared at him in astonishment.

"Say, this damn game is by me, anyhow!" he muttered. "There's goin' to be hell to pay in there pretty soon. If you want to mix up in it any more, go ahead. I'll leave the lock sprung so you can go in when you get ready."

"You're a good fellow, Harry," said Delroy appreciatively. "Perhaps you'll

give me the lay of the land. Where are all the people just now?"

Harry glanced uneasily at the door.

"The two guys that came last," he whispered, "are in the reception room at the front, hidin' behind the curtains. Exmoor, or whatever his name is—he's sitting in the library back of the parlor, feeling all right."

"Who cried out when I rang the bell?" Delroy demanded.

"I did," said Harry simply; "I'm that nervous!"

"Is Miss Eugenia here?" Delroy asked huskily.

"Yes, she's in her own room," was the answer. "She was kidnapped, I s'pose you know; but she ain't takin' it so hard. Exmoor, he told her a few things about you, sir, that made her come along with us without very much trouble."

Jerry Hampton, peering down from the landing above, saw Delroy start and grow pale, but nothing more was said. Delroy motioned for Harry to return to the apartment, and the chauffeur thereupon essayed a slight display of histrionic ability.

Opening the door and stepping in, he affected a rough impatience.

"No, I tell yer we don't want to take ice from yer!" he growled. "We got an all-right ice man already. Beat it!"

Jerry heard the latch click as he pressed the spring with his thumb, and a moment later the man slammed the door and went through the inner hall still grumbling about an imaginary ice man.

Delroy waited for something like a minute, saying nothing; then he looked back and nodded at Jerry, and stole noiselessly into the apartment.

Jerry was at the door the moment it closed again, listening with breathless suspense. Several minutes passed and nothing happened, and he pushed the door open carefully, saw that the way was clear, and darted across the narrow hall and into a small closet.

There he gathered about him sundry garments that were hanging from hooks, and drew the door to a narrow crack.

He was scarcely settled when a voice sounded resonantly across the hall.

"Well, Exmoor," said Milton Delroy, "the hunted has come to the hunter!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ROUND-UP.

EXMOOR sprang out of the chair, where he sat reading, and uttered a savage imprecation.

"What sort of a trap is this, Delroy?" he cried.

"That's for me to find out," returned Delroy; "I have walked into it, you see. We should have a battle-royal of all the animals presently, for you have two of another breed in your reception-room."

"What do you mean?" demanded Exmoor, aghast. "I am alone here, except for my man servant, and—"

"And my daughter," Delroy interrupted, "and also your old friend Kingsale and his hired thug."

"You're mad, Delroy!" exclaimed Exmoor. "Kingsale and his thug! Where are they?"

"In the reception-room—behind the curtains!" Delroy declared triumphantly.

"No longer behind the curtains!" announced Kingsale, in an even voice, and stepped into the room with a revolver held ready in his hand. "Mind you," he added, sharply, "I shall take any sudden movement as hostile, and I'm here for business."

The succession of surprises calmed Exmoor.

"How the devil did you all get into my apartment without my knowing it?" he asked.

"By the kindness of Harry, the friend-in-need to all mankind," Delroy answered dryly.

"'Twa'n't my fault!" cried Harry, from the doorway. "I did the best I could, Mr. Exmoor, but they threatened to kill me."

"The pity is," said Exmoor, "that they didn't kill you first and threaten you afterward."

"Maka too much da talk!" broke in the dark-skinned man, standing behind Kingsale. "Police-man come; all get arrest!"

"That's right," agreed Kingsale. "I am not here for a tea party. I came to have it out with Exmoor, but now that Delroy is here we may as well come to a general understanding. I want to know who has that packet of papers, and I mean to know before I leave here!"

"I was under the impression that you had them yourself," said Delroy.

"And I *am* under the impression that they have returned to Delroy's keeping," said Exmoor, pointedly.

"In that case, I certainly should not be here," retorted Delroy in a tone that carried conviction. "If their possession is to remain a secret, one man's denial is as good as another's, but if you have not got them, Kingsale, then they lay between Exmoor and that young puppy Foxford."

"My denial is registered," said Exmoor, quietly, "and I will take the liberty of speaking for Mr. Foxford to the same effect. We have yet to call on Harry for a statement, but a sense of humor forbids it. If he had the packet he would have sold it to me for a quarter hours ago. I vouch for him."

Kingsale suddenly lifted his voice.

"Miss Delroy!" he called, to the amazement to all, "it is useless for you to hide, for I know you are here. Please come in now; I have something to say to you.

"Damn you, leave her alone, Kingsale!" muttered Exmoor.

Kingsale raised the revolver.

"I am the director here," he said, coolly; "I'll have things as I want them."

The curtains parted at the doorway and Eugenia Delroy, pale and with eyes red from crying, stood trembling with fright on the threshold.

"What can you possibly—want with me?" she moaned piteously, staring at the revolver with growing terror.

"Please sit down," Kingsale said courteously, "and calm yourself. I intend no violence, Miss Delroy, but force is the only thing that these men understand.

"Now we can talk," he went on, with increasing arrogance. "First of all, I will say that I have no desire to make any one here actually unhappy. I am getting on in years, and I am more willing to forget the past than I used to be. What I value most now is ease and comfort, and I require money for those things. What Exmoor will do without the packet I can't say, but if you, Delroy, will give me cash or acceptable securities for fifty thousand dollars, I shall disappear, and you will have no more trouble from me."

"Otherwise?" murmured Delroy.

"Otherwise," Kingsale answered quickly, "I shall tell this girl some things that will make her unhappy, and these two fellows that are witnessing this meeting will be in a position to blackmail you on their own account."

Delroy's face was flushed, but he remained calm.

"You are talking with all the idiocy of the desperate blackmailer, Kingsale," he said. "When you fellows lack the adequate material you fall back invariably on vague threats and vaporings. You are such a fool that I fear your revolver more than I fear your tongue."

"We can put it to a demonstration!" Kingsale cried angrily.

"And Delroy will call you a liar," broke in Exmoor, "and you will have no proof that you are not."

"Except your testimony, Exmoor!" retorted Kingsale.

"I am not a blackmailer!" declared Exmoor, "and you would have to do without my help. I do not want money from Delroy, but I want more than that. He knows what I want, and what I will have!"

"My life, perhaps!" Delroy exclaimed with bitter sarcasm.

"Yes, but not in the usual sense, Delroy," returned Exmoor. "I do not have to explain myself to you."

"I am doing the talking here," Kingsale reminded them sharply. "Without that packet, Exmoor, you might as well talk to the wind; you are helpless, and all your schemes are futile."

"The same to you, my friend," Exmoor returned. "You are precisely in the same predicament and you are making most of the noise. It seems, gentlemen, that this meeting is rather premature. When one of us succeeds in getting what he requires it will then be time to talk along these lines. I shall not urge you to stay, and I'll wish you a very good afternoon."

Delroy was irritated by his complacency.

"You have nothing to say, Exmoor," he blurted out angrily, "about the abduction of my daughter and your holding her here a prisoner! *That* is what I came to talk about!"

"I am astonished, Delroy!" Exmoor exclaimed soberly. "If I have nothing to say about it, what have you to say, sir?"

"She goes home with me now!" cried Delroy, almost wildly, "or the matter becomes one for the police."

"Then I advise the police, by all means," said Exmoor, "for she is not going home with you. You will find a telephone in the hall."

Delroy's face became very white and he sat down heavily in a chair.

"You cannot hold her here against her will," he muttered weakly.

"And I would not," said Exmoor quietly. "Miss Delroy is not staying here against her will."

"Eugenia!" gasped Delroy, and he trembled from top to toe as he stared at her.

The girl met his eyes fearlessly, and rather coldly.

"Things have changed so very much," she said slowly. "I have always tried to be devoted to you, and you have been kind to me, most of the time; but things that have always been so mysterious in our house are clearer to me now. I don't think I could go back there again."

A great sob rose in Delroy's throat and he dropped his head upon his folded arms.

"Oh, don't take on so hard, Mr. Delroy!" spoke up Harry from the doorway, with a strange show of sympathy. "Miss Delroy, she ain't herself just now; she's scared to death, and—"

Exmoor silenced him with a gesture.

"All da time—talk, talk, talk!" muttered the dark-skinned man with vast contempt. "What for Meester Keengsell come—"

"He's right," agreed Kingsale firmly. "We are not here for a show of sentimentality, although it is interesting, in a way, to see Delroy weep; I'll believe hereafter that crocodiles do actually shed tears.

"Now," he went on, as a look of cunning narrowed his eyes, "I will drop my little bombshell. I wanted to bring out a few facts before I resorted to the extreme measure, but it takes too much time. As my friend says, there is nothing but talk. I have the packet!"

Delroy started up and looked at him dumbly.

"Where is it?" inquired Exmoor, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"No bringa here!" exclaimed the foreigner excitedly. "I tell my frien' Keengsell, no good bringa here—all bad. You show da monay—you get da pape!"

Kingsale smiled patiently.

"It would have been tempting Fate to bring it with me into such a company," he said. "The packet will not change hands again, gentlemen, until I receive my price. It makes no difference to me whether I sell it to one or the other of you, but the price must be paid."

"Fifty thousand!" Delroy muttered contemptuously.

"No, the price has gone up!" Kingsale snapped, with sudden bitterness. "I have stood here and taken your insults, and the price has risen steadily. I will accept one hundred thousand dollars for the papers; no less!"

Delroy laughed shrilly, without mirth.

"It's not so large a price," said Kingsale, "when your life and liberty depend on it. It amounts practically to that, doesn't it?"

"If you receive a hundred thousand dollars," said Exmoor, "what arrangement will be made for the delivery of the papers?"

"It will be arranged to the satisfaction

of both parties to the bargain," Kingsale replied. "Rest assured, I would not trust myself again with that packet on my person, but the money may be deposited with certain bankers, to be paid to me after I have made the delivery. It's very fair."

"Nothing that you were ever connected with was fair, Kingsale," remarked Exmoor, blandly. "'Certain bankers,' you say, would hold the money on deposit—as certain bankers held the deposits in the Blakeslee case, I fancy!"

"Delroy!" cried Kingsale savagely, "I've stood enough of this badgering. Are you ready to pay me the price?"

Delroy studied the carpet, with an abstracted, wretched air.

"You really have that packet, Kingsale?" he queried, rather naively.

"I have it!" declared the man, "and I have it in a very safe place."

"Kingsale," said Exmoor solemnly, "you lie!"

Kingsale went purple with rage. He brandished the revolver and pointed it at Exmoor's head.

"Say that again!" he cried, "and I'll blow your brains out!"

"You lie!" repeated Exmoor deliberately, and laughed aloud as the man snorted in impotent fury and thrust the revolver viciously into his pocket.

"Damn you!" roared Kingsale, "you'd be willing to die if you could make me a murderer!"

The foreigner, scowling heavily, took a murderous-looking knife from his pocket.

"Get da monay!" he commanded.

Kingsale glanced at him fearfully.

"I want the money, Delroy," he said hoarsely, "and I want it to-day. I have the packet, I tell you, and I'll deliver it promptly."

There was a movement in the doorway. Eugenia Delroy, overwrought, screamed hysterically. The others turned and saw Jerry Hampton thrust Harry aside and step into the room.

"I'm sorry to cause so much alarm," said Jerry, "but I had to come in to tell you that Kingsale has *not* the packet."

Kingsale gasped and turned upon him, and Jerry whipped two revolvers from his side pockets and covered the room generally.

"Drop that knife!" he said to the foreigner, and the command was obeyed.

Exmoor regarded him with astonishment, but smiled slightly.

"They keep coming," he exclaimed; "I didn't know the flat could accommodate so many. Your entrance was dramatic, Hampton, but I can't understand your heavy armament."

"I am heavily armed," replied Jerry, "because I feel that I am in a dangerous position; I have the packet."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ULTIMATE DISPOSITION.

"KNOWING what I know," Jerry said gravely to the thunderstruck men before him, "I would not trust myself in this room unarmed. I hesitate to think what might have happened to me last night if the whereabouts of the packet had become known. Foxford had it, as some of you know, but when he was fighting with me on the Speedway it fell from his pocket and I got it—I practically came upon it by accident. I don't know when he discovered his loss, but I don't believe that he thinks even now that I got it."

Delroy leaned forward and spoke in a quavering, pathetic voice.

"Have you opened it, Hampton?" he asked fearfully. "Have you read anything?"

Jerry shook his head.

"It was not mine to open," he replied. "It's bad enough to carry such an ill-omened thing about with one."

"If it's not yours, then who has the best claim upon it, in your estimation?" Exmoor inquired.

"I have considered that, from every conceivable point," said Jerry, "and from what has been said, and what I have seen, it seems to me that Miss Delroy is the one to be affected most by whatever se-

crets it may contain. If it is to be opened and examined, she should open it—here and now, before there is a chance for any more violence on account of it."

"God forbid!" groaned Delroy. "She mustn't touch it."

"And why?" queried Hampton. "Is it because the reading of it would shatter whatever good opinion she ever had of you?"

Delroy cringed and lifted his hand beseechingly.

"Spare me that!" he said. "I would not have her read it, because there are things there which she never could forget, and I believe that she could never be as happy again. For myself, I ask no further mercy."

"The packet is so small," said Jerry reflectively, "and it holds so much evil and terror, apparently, that one would almost ascribe supernatural properties to it. Could any benefit come to any one from the reading of it?"

"Yes!" Exmoor declared gravely. "It would right a number of wrongs and benefit a number of persons materially."

"Including yourself?" Jerry asked pointedly.

"Yes!"

"Then you are disqualified as an advocate of that course," commented Jerry.

Exmoor flushed.

"You have silenced me, Hampton," he said. "I might suggest, however, that you open the packet and read the matter, even if no one else is permitted to see it. It happens, mysteriously enough, that you are one of the men to be most benefited."

Jerry gave a start and looked intently at Exmoor and at Delroy in turn.

"You mean that I should gain by it?" he queried. "Financially?"

"Financially, yes," said Exmoor, "and very considerably."

"That puts an end to the matter!" Jerry declared.

He turned and faced Kingsale.

"You inspire distrust," he remarked coldly. "There's a revolver in your pocket. Take it very carefully by the barrel and lift it out, butt foremost, and throw it into that waste-paper basket."

Kingsale muttered sullenly, hestitated, looked sourly at the revolver that was pointed at his breast, then obeyed the command.

There was a saucer-shaped Japanese bronze ash-tray on the table, and Hampton walked over to it. He placed one of his revolvers in his pocket, but kept the other in his right hand.

He took from the inside pocket of his waistcoat the now celebrated packet—a brown fiber affair of some four by six inches—and laid it in the tray.

Delroy sighed heavily and bowed his head. Kingsale swore softly and locked his fingers together nervously. Exmoor neither changed his position nor showed a change of countenance, but his eyes were fixed intently on Hampton's face and never left it.

Hampton drew half a dozen matches from his pocket and struck them all together. As they flared, he laid them on the edge of the packet and held them there until the hard fiber paper smoked, glowed, and finally burst into flame.

A little thread of smoke curled toward the ceiling and gave off the pungent odor peculiar to the burning of ancient and musty documents. It suggested nothing of the alluring and impressive aroma of frankincense; it was literally no more than the incineration of some scraps of paper in the first dish that came to hand; yet an elderly man bowed his head low and gave away to deep sobs that racked his frame, and a young girl held her white hands over her eyes and wept with the unrestrained frankness of a child.

"I believe," said Hampton quietly—and in the heavy silence his voice took on almost a mystical quality—"that the document has yet to be written that can force an honorable man to deviate from his duty, and no more can a document compel a man without honor to observe its laws. If these papers that are burning had some fancied power to establish justice and right wrongs, then their de-

struction still leaves that justice to be established and those wrongs to be righted, and such things are never brought about except by the acts of honorable men."

CHAPTER XXV.

A TRANSPOSITION.

THE irrepressible Harry was the first to break the strained silence that followed the crumbling of the last embers of paper into ashes.

"Mr. Hampton is *some* sport, believe me!" he exclaimed heartily.

"*Some* fool!" corrected Kingsale, with infinite disgust. "I can't understand—"

"Don't try to understand, Kingsale," Exmoor interrupted; "you never could—not in a thousand years!"

The dark-skinned man was profoundly puzzled.

"Who get da monay?" he demanded, looking from one to another in anxious bewilderment.

"No one gets any money!" growled Kingsale. "That young man who lives chiefly to hear himself talk has fixed it for good and all!"

The foreigner's eyes flashed dangerously.

"You, Keengsell!" he cried, "you make talk all da time, much monay for me! Fi', ten, twent' thousan' dollar. You say I have ten thousan' dollar if I make Exmoor feller dead. I have not da chance to make dead. You say I have much monay if I get da pape! Now, what you say?"

Exmoor got up calmly and faced the desperate man.

"Kingsale has nothing more to say," he announced, "but I tell you to get out now. I am willing to let you go, and if you don't go I shall hand you over to the police. The police! You can understand that."

The fellow was sorely bewildered, but he bowed to the menace of police terrors.

"All right, I go!" he muttered. "I go outside. I see Keengsell outside, too!"

Harry opened the door for him, and he glided out of the apartment, still muttering.

"Now, you Kingsale!" ordered Exmoor. "You have finished your part. I am not particularly surprised to know that you tried to have me murdered. Don't let me find you in this neighborhood again. You were forced out of a number of Western towns in the old days for such bickerings, and now you may as well go back to the West and tell them that you have exhausted the patience of the East, and there's no room for you."

Kingsale had not recovered from his blank confusion at the disclosures made by his accomplice, but he chose discretion.

"There's nothing for me here now," he said, affecting a certain nonchalance, "so I'll go; but I always 'come back,' Exmoor; you know that. I know a few things that don't have to be backed up by papers, and I'll use them when I'm ready."

"We won't discuss that," said Exmoor sternly. "Just go; that's all I want you to do now."

As the door closed after the discomfited but defiant man, Exmoor turned to Delroy.

"If you are ill, perhaps I can offer you some refreshment," he said courteously, but with unmistakable coldness.

Delroy got up slowly.

"I am not ill," he replied; "it's something more than that! No, I don't care for anything, thank you. I can't trust myself to speak—to anybody—now, but later—"

His voice trailed off into a sigh, and he walked feebly out of the room.

"Shall I get a cab for you?" Hampton asked gently. "I'll go to your house with you, if you like."

Delroy shook his head.

"No, thank you," he murmured. "I must take care of myself. I shall see you again, Hampton, a little later."

He looked back once, and seemed on the point of speaking to Eugenia, but shook his head sorrowfully and went out.

"I think you may take the evening off,

Harry," said Exmoor presently. "That will give me time to think what should be done in a case as unique as yours."

Harry's mobile face expressed pain and disappointment.

"I like you first rate to work for, Mr. Exmoor!" he declared, "and I'm sure, sir, I've done the best I could."

"Yes, you've done your best," Exmoor agreed, with a slight smile, "and that is a good deal. Now, please go out, and I'll talk with you again."

Jerry Hampton moved uncertainly toward the door.

"I'd rather you didn't go yet, Hampton," said Exmoor, "unless you wish to. We shall be alone now, I think."

"Mr. Foxford is living here, I believe," Jerry returned, a little stiffly.

"Not exactly living here," said Exmoor. "He helped me to get here, and stood ready to help me defend myself from attack, but he was not to come back tonight unless I sent for him."

Eugenia, who had been silent for a long time, got up and looked at Jerry wistfully.

"I hope you will stay for a while," she said softly. "There are so many things that ought to be explained to you!"

"I haven't asked for explanations," Jerry replied. "By chance I have been rather intimately connected with certain affairs, but now it is all over, apparently, and I am not inclined to be inquisitive. I wouldn't be human, of course, if I didn't feel mystified still, but—"

"You wonder that I left my home so abruptly," she interrupted, "and I wouldn't let you go without explaining that to you."

"I have felt vaguely for a long time," said Jerry, "that Milton Delroy is not your father. He was devoted to you, in his way, beyond all doubt, but I could never reconcile myself to the belief that you were his daughter. He belongs to a different type of humanity."

Eugenia twisted her handkerchief between her fingers and dropped her eyes.

"But Milton Delroy *is* my father," she said tremulously.

Jerry was abashed.

"Why, I'm sorry I spoke so hastily," he said, uncomfortably. "I thought—"

"The man who is not my father is Irving Exmoor," she broke in.

Jerry turned around, utterly bewildered, and looked from her to Exmoor.

"The explanation is simple enough," said the latter, "if you will transpose two names, Hampton."

"You mean?" cried Jerry.

"My name is Milton Delroy, and Eugenia is my daughter," said the man who had walked so long in a cloak of mystery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES.

"I WILL tell you a long story, as briefly as I can, Hampton," said the new Milton Delroy, after he had asked Eugenia to leave them alone for a while. "And it's a hard story for me to tell—hardest of all for me to tell it to you."

"Then why tell it?" returned Jerry.

"It has to be told," answered the other simply. "It may be difficult for you at first to keep in mind that the man you have known as Delroy is really Irving Exmoor, but it will become clearer to you. I met him in the West after I left college and we were associated in business.

"He was older than I, and I fell under his influence from the first, through the strength of his personality. I had certain high ideals, but he opposed them with his theories of ambition and progress, and gradually broke them down. We juggled with real estate and mining property in the Middle West, and when I awoke to the realization that we were little better than shysters and swindlers, I was too deep in the mire to get out.

"Exmoor's ambition was limitless, and he began to cover the country with his operations. He stopped at nothing to get money and property. Forgery, blackmail —even violence—were nothing more than business methods to him. He took men's

fortunes away from them when they were drunk.

"I have to tell you, Hampton, that he took one man's soul away from him, here in New York. He taught that man depravity and vice, and when he had wrecked him beyond all hope of regeneration he took his money and his property away and kicked him into the street. The man was Stephen Beauchamp."

"My father," said Jerry, in a low voice, without raising his downcast eyes.

"Yes, your father," replied the other, "and I was one of the instruments of his destruction, Hampton."

Jerry bowed dumbly.

"I was married after that," continued the narrator, "and for a time I was very happy; but I could not get out of the entanglements that Exmoor had woven around me. Kingsale became a partner in our enterprises, and we opened an office in Minneapolis under my name. Scarcely realizing what I did, I traveled through the West, selling thousands of dollars' worth of mining stock that was worth less than the paper and printing of the certificates. Naturally the thing had to end, and I became a fugitive from justice.

"The business in Minneapolis was too valuable to give up," he went on bitterly, "so Exmoor persuaded me to join him in a clever scheme. I had not been in the city enough to become known, so he appeared there under my name, declared himself as the proprietor of the office, and repudiated me in the newspapers, claiming that he was the real Milton Delroy, and that I had assumed his name for the purpose of swindling people. He went so far as to reimburse a few of the people that had suffered, and he built up a considerable credit on the strength of it.

"I fled to Mexico, and stayed there four years. My wife died in Kansas City, alone and without friends; and because it was known to some that Milton Delroy had a child, Exmoor took the orphan baby and reared her as his daughter. With all his faults, he had a certain strain of affection in his nature, and I believe that he loved Eugenia more than anything else in his life. He was really a kind father.

"When my face and my crimes were forgotten I came back and wandered over the country, under Exmoor's patronage and protection. Utterly at his mercy I became a weak and willing pawn. We swindled and blackmailed on a large scale, and whenever I had decent impulses to break loose and begin over again, Exmoor held certain items of our past correspondence before me, and threatened me with exposure if I failed him.

"His hold on me was not as strong as he wanted it to be, so he and Kingsale framed a murder on me in Seattle. I was attacked in the street, by a prearranged plan, and in the fight that followed a man was killed. I had fired no shot, but I was accused of the murder, and I had to run away again. I couldn't stand publicity and investigations with such a past back of me, you see.

"After that I lived practically in hiding, doing Exmoor's bidding and working under his orders. He accumulated such wealth that he retired and came to live like a sedate and cultured gentleman in the house at Inwood. I stayed in the West and collected his revenues and his blackmail for him, and Kingsale kept me constantly under observation for him.

"But out of the direct influence of his personality," the narrator continued, with a sigh of satisfaction, "I began to plan a future for myself. I had got a little money together, and I speculated legitimately and won more, in spite of Kingsale's watchfulness. In five years I secretly made a little fortune for myself, and by operating through trustworthy agents I managed to pay back a large part of the money that I had taken from people at the time of the Minneapolis swindles.

"About that time I disappeared and Exmoor and Kingsale could not find me. I ran down the Seattle frame-up and got so much evidence in my defense that I gave myself up to the police, and was tried and acquitted. I was wanted in Minneapolis on the old charge, but when

I was taken there for trial, the people that I had swindled refused to appear against me, and the story of restitution came out and made something of a hero of me.

"My name, however, was still Irving Exmoor, and I couldn't prove it otherwise without making a nation-wide scandal and dragging my daughter into the public eye. She was happy, it seemed, and Exmoor convinced me, in his letters, that she should remain in ignorance of the true state of affairs.

"Kingsale became dissatisfied about that time, and prepared to blackmail Exmoor on his own account, but Exmoor had covered himself and his future with such a clever fabric of scheming that he could not be touched; he was a genius in crime. Kingsale had one hope: Exmoor had shown him a packet of papers and correspondence that he cherished as a weapon to hold over me in an emergency. They were letters in which I confessed my crimes and arranged with him for the exchange of our identities, and there were certain bits of evidence which I still feared. Kingsale told me that if he could get that packet, he would turn it against Exmoor and bleed him dry.

"Kingsale started for New York from Kansas City, and I followed him, determined to protect my daughter from possible disgrace and unhappiness. I have been here six months, watching the Inwood place most of the time, and watching for Kingsale. I rented a house-boat because I didn't want to live among people, and I kept it near the Inwood place. When I found that Kingsale was really on the trail, I decided to get the packet myself and to use it as I might see fit.

"I got it, and you know the rest of the story. It would have been simpler and wiser for Exmoor to destroy the papers himself, and I wonder that he didn't; but you'll always find that a crook has some favorite fancy like that, some mysterious relic of his crimes which he cherishes.

"After I met you and heard something of the state of affairs between Eugenia and her supposed father, I began to change my plans. Then, when the climax came, I realized that Exmoor was in a tight place. I thought he would flee and take Eugenia away with him, so I took no chances: I kidnaped her myself, and when I told her my story it confirmed some of her vague suspicions, and she believed it. I am now beginning life over again."

Hampton looked at the regenerated Milton Delroy in awed silence for a while, visibly affected and impressed.

"You may wonder," the man broke out again, "why I asked you to examine the packet. In some of the correspondence you would have found references to your father, and you would have discovered that he was outrageously swindled out of his property which you now occupy. By rights, Hampton, you are the owner of it, and there are other parcels of property which should be restored to you."

Jerry smiled dryly.

"I destroyed my claim to fortune by my own free will," he said, "and I'll abide by it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TO DO AND DARE.

ON Jerry's return home that night he found Grandmother Hampton in a state of serious anxiety over his protracted absence. He had only commonplace excuses to offer, and the old lady was hurt and worried, so he devoted himself to her.

He heard nothing of the man he had known as Delroy, or of the other actors in the recent drama, until Eugenia called upon his grandmother one afternoon. For an hour she chatted with the old lady, saying nothing of her extraordinary change of fortunes, while Jerry sat silent and ill at ease in the room with them. Then she asked him to show her the garden.

"I saw at once," she said, "that you had told your grandmother nothing of what happened the other day, and I—well, I'm scarcely able to talk about it yet. My father is anxious about you, Mr. Hampton; he is fond of you, and he wonders

if you will feel friendly to him in the future. He said that it would be no more than natural if you never came to see us again, but I could hardly believe that."

"It would not be natural—in me," Jerry responded. "I liked your father from the very first, you know. If you—if *you* want me to come to your house, Miss Delroy, I shall certainly be there."

"You're not afraid of meeting Mr. Foxford?" she inquired, with a suggestion of mischievousness.

"Mr. Foxford," said Jerry soberly, "is still a mystery to me."

"I know," she returned quickly. "My father left him out of his explanations because he did not think of him. When my father met Mr. Foxford, he learned that the man who brought me up, you know, was still yielding to his passion for swindling. Mr. Foxford had become his victim and had been bled of a large part of his fortune. That was why so much mystery existed in that case, you see.

"My father told Foxford that he would bring the man to terms and get back some of the money he had lost. Mr. Foxford is rather a simple young man, and he was so glad to see a ray of hope that he became almost too enthusisatic an assistant to father. You can see, now, why he was so active in the case."

Jerry smiled, slightly embarrassed.

"Have you or has your father heard anything of Del—of Mr. Exmoor, since that night?" he asked.

"That is really why I came here today," she said. "Father wants to see you soon, and he will come here, or receive you at our house, as you please. He has seen Mr. Exmoor, and I suppose because Mr. Exmoor dreads to meet you again, he asked my father to act as his agent in a matter that affects you.

"I was given leave to tell you that he wants to make over deeds of property to you, and that the property is worth something like five hundred thousand dollars. It was worth much less than that, of course, when he robbed your father of it, but it is rightfully yours, and father says that the transfer will be made without any trouble or delay."

Jerry was stricken dumb for the moment. He studied the pebbles in the garden path and wondered what a man should say at such a time to such a bearer of good tidings.

"I hardly think you will ever see Mr. Exmoor again," Eugenia went on, in an effort to relieve the tension. "He is absolutely a broken man, and he is going away—far away, I guess. He caused my father a great many years of misery and I can't help feeling bitter toward him when I think of all he did, but neither can I help feeling sorry for him now. He seems overwhelmed with remorse, and my father shook hands with and forgave him.

"He wanted to give me the house in Inwood where I lived so long, but we couldn't accept it. He told father that he was making plans for the restitution of thousands of dollars that he took from his victims, and we believe that he is sincere about it."

"I will call on your father soon," Jerry said gravely, "and talk with him. Naturally, I am overwhelmed by such news."

"And when you are through talking of business with him," said Eugenia naively, "you will call on me, I hope."

She began moving toward the gate as she spoke, and she held out her hand to bid him good-by.

Jerry took the hand and held it, and she did not try to withdraw it.

"I have looked at you from a distance for a long time," he said, "and I never dared come very near. You were accustomed to wealth and social advantages, and I had neither of those things. I didn't dare look at you or hear your voice, for I didn't want to become any more miserable than I was. But now, it seems —it seems that I am to be a person of wealth and some importance, so—"

"So now you'll dare!" she cried, with a merry laugh, and ran gaily out of the garden.

THE END.

Dropping Into Mexico

by F. K. Scribner

I.

THE aeroplane, hovering like a great bird of prey a thousand feet above the plain, hung motionless. The motor was revolving fitfully; Jones yanked the lever, listened and cursed softly.

Not turning to look at his companion, he said shortly:

"Something's wrong; I'm afraid we must go down."

The other, strapped in his seat, fingers gripping the uprights on either side, swallowed the lump which had risen in his throat.

"But that is Mexican soil," he remonstrated.

"Yes," said Jones, "but the motor is jumping like the devil, and I can't fix it up here."

He looked down at the plain below, dotted with patches of green and yellow. His trained eye caught the gleam of a white wall and the dull red of the roofs which marked the tops of a cluster of squat houses. He pulled the lever gently.

"But there may be trouble, landing in Mexico; you, an American army officer," argued his companion.

"Shucks!" growled Lieutenant Jones. "No need to tell them that, and in half an hour we will be up again. Do you hear that motor?"

As if to lend weight to his argument a series of spiteful sputters split the air.

"We couldn't go five miles farther," Jones added, and slipped the lever over.

The aeroplane dipped suddenly, swerved downward and glided in a wide circle toward the earth below.

The outlines of the cluster of houses became more distinct, the yellow patches resolved themselves into stretches of sand, the green blotches into groves of trees, bunches of cactus and several acres of coarse-bladed grass. The air-ship swooped downward more rapidly, described another circle and hovered three hundred yards above the earth.

There was a goodly piece of level land, clear of obstacles, behind the houses; again Jones pulled a lever, the aeroplane made a final swoop, skimmed over the surface of the ground and came to rest with a jolt which was scarcely perceptible.

The two men loosened the buckles of the straps and pushed back their heavy head-gear. Jones removed his gauntlets and opened a tool-box.

"We'll have this thing fixed presently; in the mean time you might trot over to the house and borrow a pail of water," he suggested, and turned to the motor.

"And proffer our apologies for trespassing on private property; now, if this Mexican is not friendly there may be—" the other began.

"Go and find out; you should be able to manage the thing," interrupted Lieutenant Jones tersely.

Several persons had appeared from around the corner of the buildings; they were dark complexioned, wore short, braided jackets and broad-brimmed hats, and one carried a carbine. The American met them half way across the field which separated the stranded aeroplane from the nearest house.

Each stopped, the Mexicans with lowering faces, Jones's companion with a smile which was wholly forced.

"We got into trouble up there, and had to come down; we shall be off again presently," he explained.

"Gringoes!" said one of the Mexicans; and added something in Spanish which the American did not understand.

"I would like to see the *señor*—I can explain to him the—circumstances," the American went on.

He recognized that the others were peons employed upon the place, and that their attitude was hostile.

The man with the carbine advanced a few paces; he began to talk excitedly, making violent gestures.

"Yes," said the American desperately, "but the *señor* will understand."

The situation was becoming tense, the attitude of the peons more hostile; they could speak no English, the man in the leather jacket no Spanish. The noise of blows, iron upon iron, came from the stranded air-bird, where Jones was working on the motor.

"Gringoes!" said the fellow with the carbine, and scowled darkly; the others pressed up behind him.

The American's hand went to his pocket, his fingers closed on the butt of his revolver, but he knew, if it came to that, he would stand no chance — five against one.

And then, from around the corner of the main building, a dozen rods away, appeared a sixth Mexican, who advanced across the field toward the group.

The new-comer was an old man, apparently in the seventies; his face was swarthy, rendered more so by his snow-white hair and the closely cropped beard. He was dressed in black, wore gold-rimmed spectacles and had the erect carriage of a soldier, though his shoulders stooped a little.

He passed the group of peons, scarcely noticing them, for he was looking at the stranger in the leather jacket.

"What is this?" he asked in English, for he saw that the other was an American.

The aviator took his hand out of his pocket.

"We met with some trouble up there; the motor went wrong, and we were forced to descend; I must apologize for trespassing, but it was unavoidable; we will get away again as soon as possible," he explained.

The old Mexican looked across the field at the aeroplane.

"It is unfortunate; and what were you doing so far across the border? Americans are not very popular with us just now," said he.

"Yes," the American admitted, "but being something of amateurs at flying, we lost our reckoning a bit; if you will permit us half an hour on your land and—a—a pail of water, I think we can get away again without any harm to any one."

The old Mexican smiled dryly.

"A long flight for an amateur, twenty miles beyond the frontier, is it not so, *señor?*" he queried.

"I did not know it was so far; perhaps you can understand, if you have ever traveled in an air-ship," suggested the American.

"No," said the Mexican gravely, "and I have really never seen one. If the *señor* does not mind I will walk over and examine this wonderful invention. And the pail of water."

He turned to the peons and gave an order in Spanish. On the way across the field he said, still gravely:

"You will understand my boys are not fond of Americans, and perhaps it is fortunate I am at home to-day. I have lived for several years in the States, and have many friends among your countrymen."

As they approached the aeroplane Jones arose and wiped a greasy hand across his forehead. His face was red and perspiring; he had thrown off his jacket, and a medley of tools were scattered on the ground. He looked at the old Mexican, and the latter returned the scrutiny, his eyes narrowing behind the thick lenses of his glasses.

"It is Señor—" began Jones's companion.

"Bilbao," finished the Mexican, "and is it that I am mistaken?"

His keen eyes searched again the grimy face of the young army officer.

Jones grinned, wiped his hands with a bunch of waste, and extended one of them to the *señor.*

"You see," said he, "I took you at your word, Señor Bilboa, and have dropped in for a friendly call. And the *señorita?*"

"Quite well," answered the Mexican; then, smiling faintly: "It is quite novel, is it not, lieutenant, dropping from the clouds into our back yard, as you would style it in America?"

Jones grinned again. "I will confess it is not entirely conventional, but, passing over your place, I thought I would descend."

"And your friend has been apologizing; he said something about an amateur and a broken engine, and—ah yes—a pail of water." The *señor's* eyes were twinkling behind the lenses; it was plain he was enjoying the situation.

Jones looked at his fellow aviator.

"Oh, Robinson!" said he. "You see, *señor,* Mr. Robinson is one of the newspaper boys at Columbus, and something of an amateur, for this is his first long flight. You will, of course, understand that I hardly expected to accept your invitation of two years ago in this fashion; but, as Robinson has explained, we had motor trouble up there and I picked out the softest spot to land. What seemed a hardship has turned out otherwise, for it has brought us to your door. Yet "—he hesitated—"I should have preferred coming another way; we, of course, realize the inadvisability of trespassing on Mexican soil in this fashion."

The Mexican's face had become grave.

"Yes," said he, "unfortunately conditions have arisen which make it inadvisable for an American officer to fly over Mexican territory and alight south of the Rio Grande. These conditions, as you understand, I deplore deeply, as do many of my compatriots, but my wretched country is given over to an unruly element who are in the majority. Here, fortunately, I have some authority, but had you landed elsewhere in Mexico the consequences might have been most distressing, *señor.*"

Robinson, recollecting the attitude of the five peons who had confronted him a few minutes before, subscribed mentally to this opinion; he ventured to voice the reminder:

"But we will be off again presently; have you found the trouble, lieutenant?"

"Yes," replied Jones shortly, "and—it's pretty serious; if I can get this thing fixed up within a couple of hours we'll be fortunate."

Señor Bilbao went over and looked at the motor.

"I do not understand these things, but is it so something is so disarranged you cannot mend it readily?" he inquired.

"I fear so," answered Jones soberly. He looked at his watch. "We have four more hours of daylight; I hope to get away by five o'clock."

A peon was approaching, carrying the pail of water. He set it down near the stranded aeroplane, scowled at the Americans and went back across the field. The old Mexican's eyes followed him.

"You will pardon me," said he gravely, "if I leave you for a few minutes. I desire to tell Señorita Pepita who it is that has so unexpectedly dropped down upon us; the child is unfamiliar with the human air-bird; it may interest her."

He went toward the houses, walking briskly. Robinson looked at Lieutenant Jones.

"Do you know what is up?" said he grimly. "The old fellow is going to explain to that band of cut-throats that we've landed here to pay him a social call; he hopes that will quiet them, but I wouldn't bet a plugged nickel on it. I met five of the bunch on my way to the house and as bad a lot as I ever tackled. Get at that motor, Jones, and let's get away from here; the old man seems friendly, but he's a Mexican. I wouldn't trust one of them with a misfit key to a hall bedroom."

Jones turned to the motor.

"And who's this Señor Bilbao, anyway? You seem to have run across him before," Robinson went on.

"At West Point, and afterward in Washington," Jones explained. "He was a senator under Diaz, and finished out a diplomatic career in the Mexican embassy at the capital. He went up to the Point with a delegation, and his daughter was along; at the annual hop I saw considerable of her, and a little more the next fall when I was stationed in Washington, when the old man invited me to drop in on them should I ever happen to be in Mexico."

"Well, it seems here we are, right on the *señor's* doorstep," grunted Robinson.

"He's of the old school, of the Diaz régime, and is out of joint, I fancy, with the present conditions in his country," Jones continued. "Bilbao is one of those Mexicans who has an excellent knowledge of the States, and realizes that we Americans want to be on friendly terms with our neighbors. We have nothing to fear if he can control the situation."

"If he can," Robinson growled. "A good many Mexicans are out of joint with present conditions, but I reckon they're about one in a thousand. I doubt if this Señor Bilbao would cut much figure if a band of Villistas should happen this way."

He looked off across the fields to the expanse of sand beyond, stretching in an unbroken desert to the range of mountains toward the south. And looking, he saw a horseman speeding away from the group of houses; a rider who was urging his mount with whip and spur.

"That don't look good to me, no matter what Bilbao's sentiments may be. Get at that motor; is there anything I can do?" said he shortly.

"Except stop your croaking," Jones replied, and bent over the refractory machinery once more.

Five minutes passed, then ten; the horseman was now a long way off, a cloud of dust marking his course across the plain. The lieutenant looked up from the motor, his face bathed in perspiration, a frown puckering his brows. He pulled a lever, jerked it back and twisted a spark plug; a muffled report which degenerated into a feeble sputter rewarded the effort, then the sputter died away and there was silence.

"What's the matter?" Robinson asked sharply.

"I'm afraid," Jones answered, "we're up against it; this comes from the government furnishing us with these one-horse aeroplanes, though I thought I'd got this one in pretty fair running order."

"You mean we can't get away?"

"It begins to look like it, for a little, anyway," his companion answered.

The reporter looked at the stranded air-bird with an expression in which grimness predominated.

"I presume your friend, the *señor*, has horses handy, and might be willing to lend us a couple?" he ventured.

"Probably," Jones replied, "but you see *I* can't leave government property stranded here in semi-hostile territory. I suppose you figure that we could put it in charge of the *señor*, go back and return with the necessary repair outfit?"

"Yes," said the other shortly, his face reddening; "you didn't think I meant to bolt for good, did you?"

"It can't be worked, for it's my business to stay here and either fix the thing up or guard it until I can send back to headquarters; we haven't so many aeroplanes lying around that we can afford to risk losing one."

He looked at his watch.

"It will begin to get dark in a couple of hours; I'll make another try, and if I can't work it we'll have to accept the *señor's* hospitality for one night anyway. In the morning we might arrange for you to get a guide and ride back, when they could send another 'plane to help me out."

"I don't propose to desert you in this devil's kitchen, you can bank on that," retorted Robinson tersely, and there was a grimness in his tone which precluded argument.

Señor Bilbao was coming across the field; a few steps behind him walked a broad-shouldered Mexican who carried across one arm a short-barreled carbine. As they approached Bilbao's dark eyes looked at the aeroplane searchingly, then at Lieutenant Jones questioningly.

The Americans looked in turn at the Mexican with the carbine and the expression on their faces asked a question of the *señor* why had he brought with him an armed attendant?

"It is Jose," explained Bilbao shortly. "You, of course, understand that certain things have strained the relations between our countries; there are many who misunderstand Americans. It is to be regretted—in the day of Diaz this would not have happened, nor would I need suffer this humiliation—that I must place an armed guard to protect the property of a guest while he enters my house to accept my hospitality."

The old Mexican's eyes flashed angrily.

"It is the peons," ventured Robinson, "and we are in Villa's territory."

"The *señor* understands," replied Bilbao. "It is the peons who I am not able to control. And Villa!" He made a violent gesture. "He is all powerful in the north and stops at nothing; he is in the mountains yonder, and a few hours' hard riding would bring his band upon us. It is the humiliation to make the confession, that it is wiser you depart, mounting into the clouds from which you came. But first you must partake of the refreshment which my daughter has ordered to be prepared; in the meantime Jose, who is wholly trustworthy, will see that no one troubles the aeroplane."

"Of course we understand that the horseman who rode toward the mountains has gone to inform the bandits of our presence here; we don't want to get you into trouble, *señor,* but—" Robinson stopped and looked at Jones.

"You see," the lieutenant explained grimly, "we can't get away to the border by the air route; the motor has broken down."

II.

His back against the side of the stranded aeroplane, pipe-stem gripped between his teeth, Robinson smoked in silence, looking out across the dreary stretch of sand now invisible in the darkness.

The night was clear and a myriad stars dotted the vault above him; on the left the lights from the clustered buildings gleamed yellow through the blackness, but everywhere was appalling stillness, a nerve-racking solitude broken only by the heavy breathing of a sleeping man.

For Jones, head pillowed on arm, was stretched upon the grass taking his forty winks before it should be his turn to act the sentinel.

For two hours the reporter had maintained his vigil, looking across the desert, listening for the expected sound which might come from the direction of the hidden range of mountains to the south. Should it come—the dull beat of hoofs in the darkness—he knew the situation must be a desperate one; neither he nor his companion cherished any delusions on that score. If they came, it would be Villistas to destroy the hated gringoes who had descended from the clouds.

Two things had been decided before darkness fell, and they had taken up their

vigil beside the aeroplane. That they would not accept Señor Bilbao's proffer of a pair of mounts to take them back to the border, for, leaving out of the question Jones's reluctance to desert the air-ship, the half-heartedness of the offer was obvious. They understood it was through no lack of good will on the part of the old Mexican, but that he understood the grave consequences which might arise to his household should the Villistas come and discover he had assisted in the escape of the Americans.

As the lieutenant put it tersely, it would be a sorry thing to leave in danger of gross insult, or worse, an old man and a young girl while they fled northward and saved their own skins.

And they also declined to accept the *señor's* hospitality for the night, for should the bandits arrive they must perforce turn the house into a fortress and defend themselves, which could have but one ending, their own destruction and that of Bilbao and his daughter.

For a brief half hour, leaving the half-breed Jose on guard beside the aeroplane, the Americans had visited the dwelling. Now smoking his pipe and listening for the noise that at any moment might come out of the darkness, Robinson repictured to himself the girl who had greeted them on the broad veranda.

If Señorita Pepita shared the anxiety of her father she gave no evidence of it; her soft brown eyes were sparkling as she came forward to meet Lieutenant Jones; the glow of health burned in her oval cheeks, just tinged with that delicate olive common among the well born of the southern races. The expression of her face was piquant, vivacious, eager, and the flush which covered it as she returned Jones's greeting heightened its charm.

She had added her request to that of Bilbao that the Americans make their quarters in the house, at least until morning, and when they had refused it was she who had given the order that blankets be provided them in order that their night in the open might be more comfortable.

The reporter gripped the pipe-stem harder between his teeth and frowned at the curtain of darkness which hid the plain and distant mountain range.

"Bilbao is an old fool to keep that girl unprotected in this nest of bandits," he muttered.

He shifted his posture, arose and stretched his cramped limbs. Taking out his watch he bent down and flashed for an instant the rays of a pocket lamp upon the dial.

"One o'clock—and all's well!" said he grimly, "but how long will all remain well?"

He began to pace restlessly back and forth beside the aeroplane.

A breeze from the west had sprung up, which ruffled the wings of the air-ship, and little groaning sounds broke the solitude. The yellow gleam from the windows of the house had disappeared; it seemed to Robinson that he and Jones, sleeping with his head upon his arm, were the only living things south of the friendly border where safety lay.

And then the illusion was dispelled. A voice, harsh, in Spanish jargon, rang out upon the night. The voice was followed by a sharper sound: a heavy blow struck upon resounding wood.

Circling the aeroplane he bent over Jones and shook him roughly. The lieutenant sat up suddenly, then leaped to his feet, brushing a hand across his eyes.

"They are there—at the house," Robinson explained.

A light flashed from a window; a medley of voices shouting angrily and another blow.

"It is the Villistas, routing up the place," said Jones grimly.

"And when they don't find us there they'll be out here after us. It's going to be the real thing; we're in for it. Shall we fire at the first rush; or make a running fight of it?" The reporter's voice trembled just a little.

"We can't hold out against a crowd of them, a dozen to one, or probably even greater odds. The chances are small

enough at best, but we'll make the most of them. Now, if you can find a horse don't stand on ceremony; the peons will tell those devils Bilbao didn't give us a mount to get away, so it will let him out. The stables are back of the main building on the side farthest from the front door; I'm going—"

Jones stopped abruptly, for a figure appeared suddenly out of the darkness. The click of the hammer of the revolver in the lieutenant's hand sounded sharply.

"Don't shoot!" said a voice in Spanish. "It is I—Jose."

It is well Jones understood, for in another second he would have pressed the trigger.

"It is the Villistas?" he asked shortly.

"They have come," the half-breed replied excitedly. "The *señor* is explaining that you are not here, but they believe you are hidden in the house. Some will search and the others come here. It is the *señorita's* orders I am obeying; there is a back door to the stable, there may yet be time and I will show you the fastest horses. Do not hesitate, *señors;* the *señorita* urges you to go. There are a dozen, perhaps more have come and others may not be far behind."

Jones translated this information to his companion.

"We have no time to lose, and they cannot say that Bilbao harbored us or assisted in our escape," he added. Then to Jose: "Take us to the stable."

They followed the half-breed, moving in a wide détour across the field toward the rear of the building.

"Ask him if Villa is there," Robinson whispered.

"I do not think so, *señor*," Jose replied, "for I did not see him on the veranda; but they are his men, and he may come later. You are armed, *señors?*"

"We have our revolvers, but we must trust to other things to-night," the lieutenant answered.

They reached the stables unmolested, for the bandits were gathered before the main building and on the veranda; it was evident also that the hostile peons on the place were too much interested in the arrival of the band to keep watch on the movements of the two Americans, who, being without horses, could scarcely be expected to escape. And besides, the peons thought they had taken refuge in the house.

Ignorant and superstitious, they looked upon the aeroplane as a strange devil which had descended from the clouds; to approach its resting place after dark might be to invite sure destruction.

Jose, followed by his companions, entered the stable unopposed; knowing his ground perfectly the half-breed did not hesitate, but led the way past the line of stalls and noiselessly unbolted the back door. Beyond lay the open country, invisible in the darkness; once mounted, a bolt through the door, and safety might be assured.

With unerring instinct the Mexican turned to the stalls and backed out a horse, thrusting the halter rope into the hand of Jones. He entered a second stall and repeated the operation.

"The saddles in a moment, *señors,* and make no noise," he whispered.

The Americans stood tense in the darkness while he was gone. Several minutes passed and he returned, staggering under the weight of the two heavy saddles, and began to adjust one on the back of the horse held by Robinson. He buckled the girth strap deftly and stooped to pick up the other saddle.

"A moment, *señors,* and all will be well," he whispered.

But all was not well. Even as he straightened himself there came through the night a harsh cry of anger, a Spanish oath and a resounding crash. With saddle poised above the horse's back Jose stood motionless.

A second cry came through the darkness; Jones and the half-breed caught the words: "Death to the traitor to Mexico—death to the gringoes!" A chorus of angry voices followed, the sound of cursing, and a sharp report.

The Mexican dropped the saddle on the horse's back.

"*Señors,*" he cried, "it is what I feared. They have quarreled, the *señor* and the Villistas. He has shut the door in their faces; my place is no longer here."

But Jones did not need to be told. The cry: "Death to the traitor to Mexico!" was sufficient. Stung by some insult the hot-blooded old *señor* had come to odds with the bandits.

It was probable the crash they had heard was the slamming of the door in the faces of those who crowded the veranda. The Villistas would force an entrance, and their vengeance would be merciless.

Jose was making for the front door of the stable; in another moment he would be gone, hastening to defend his master. Jones did not hesitate.

"Wait!" he called sharply in Spanish; then to Robinson: "We have brought about this situation, the house must be defended—come on!"

Following the half-breed they ran across the intervening space to the rear of the main building; in another moment they were inside and Jose had bolted the door behind them. From the veranda came a chorus of angry voices, blows on the door and the clatter of spurred feet.

"How many can we count on in this business? I suppose the peons will side with those fellows out there?" Jones asked of their guide.

"There is the *señor,* my son, Francisco, and Estaban," Jose explained.

"That makes six, counting ourselves, and the odds are probably three or four to one, but the advantage is temporarily ours; we can settle with a bunch of those bandits anyway, before they get us," said the lieutenant grimly.

He turned to Robinson.

"We are in for it and taking desperate chances, but there is no other way. Remember this: these Mexicans are cowards when it comes to a stand-up fight, and a few well-directed shots will send them scurrying to cover. Our greatest danger lies in their setting fire to the house or rushing us from several quarters at once. But if they do not number more than a dozen or so, that is not probable until they receive reinforcements. If Villa is not here it is in our favor. How near is a garrison of Carranza's men?" he asked of Jose.

"At Galeana, *señor,* fifteen miles," the half-breed replied.

"They are our only hope; if we can keep these fellows off until morning and get word to them they may arrive in time to rescue us."

He repeated this in Spanish. "Can you get a messenger through to Galeana? It will weaken our force by one, but it is our only chance."

"Yes," said Jose, "I will go to Galeana; it is not for nothing the *señor* once saved my life. I will bring the soldiers here to rescue him."

"Good!" said Jones, "and haste is necessary." He laid his hand on the half-breed's shoulder. "Ride like the devil, man, if you would save your master and the *señorita.*"

The tumult on the veranda was increasing; a shot rang out, and a second followed it.

"Go down the hall, it is the door at the other end," instructed the Mexican. He slipped the bolt and disappeared.

Jones fastened the door again, and at that instant the other door at the further end of the passage opened. The light from the front room revealed the two Americans; the person who had opened the door uttered an exclamation, and the barrel of a revolver gleamed in the yellow rays. It was the girl, Pepita, who confronted them.

She recognized the intruders even as Jones uttered the cry not to fire; but for a moment she did not lower the revolver. Then her hand dropped to her side; the face of Bilbao appeared behind her.

"You are here?" said he shortly.

He manifested no surprise; in the last quarter of an hour he had aged five years, but his eyes shone brightly and a flash heightened the sallow color of his cheeks. It was the fever of excitement, and perhaps despair.

Jones came forward and looked into the room, which was lighted by a single lamp, burning on a center-table. His trained eye, searching for methods of defense, took in every detail: the heavy oaken door barred on the inside, the two wide windows over which thick wooden shutters had been drawn and bolted down.

Beside Bilbao and the girl there were two others who had faced the bandits; one was a young Mexican, a beardless youth the pallor of whose face showed ghastly in the lamplight. The other was a man of middle age, with straight black hair which fell to his broad shoulders, and a complexion swarthy as an Indian's.

Each was armed with a rifle, and two others leaned against the wall between the windows; on the table was a little pile of cartridges.

Suddenly a shower of splinters flew inward from the oaken door, and a bit of plaster dropped from the wall opposite; the crash of the discharge came from the veranda.

"It is the fourth shot they have fired," said Bilbao unemotionally.

"And the walls?" Jones demanded.

"Are of stone."

"Then if we keep out of range of the door and windows their bullets can harm no one. How many do you think are out there, *señor?*"

"Ten, a dozen, perhaps more; I have no means of knowing, and there are the peons," replied the old Mexican.

"We need not count the peons; and how many other entrances to the house are there, *señor?*"

"The door through which you entered and three windows, except those on the upper floor," Bilbao answered.

"And you have left them unguarded?" Jones turned upon the two Mexicans. "Go quickly and bolt the shutters; then one of you remain at the back door!" he ordered peremptorily.

Order was succeeding chaos; the Mexicans left the room hurriedly. Jones stripped off his heavy aviator jacket, for the atmosphere of the room was stifling.

"I think we can hold them off until morning, and at the first daylight they will scatter to cover," said he encouragingly. "Jose is already on the way to Galeana, and within a few hours we may look for a rescuing party from the garrison." Under his breath he added: "If Jose gets through!"

A volley of blows resounded against the door.

"Open!" a voice demanded; "it is the gringoes we seek, *señor;* you will not be harmed."

Jones caught up one of the rifles leaning against the wall, stepped before the door and fired three times in rapid succession. The bullets splintered the panel; there was a cry of pain outside, terrible curses and the noise of booted feet beating a hasty retreat.

"A little of their own medicine," muttered the lieutenant.

He replaced the spent shells from the supply on the table and looked at his companions across the room, through the haze of drifting powder smoke. The girl, white faced, was standing beside her father.

"*Señorita,*" said Jones, "the second floor is unguarded, and those fellows may take it into their head to climb upon the roof of the veranda. If you will show me the way we must close the shutters up there; the *señor* and Robinson can handle the situation here until we return."

He had assumed command. The girl looked at her father and the old Mexican nodded; without a word she left the room and Jones, carrying the rifle, followed.

In the hall at the top of the stairs a lamp burned dimly; the American saw that this corridor ran through the center of the building, and that on either side were several doors. The girl opened one.

"This is the room directly over the roof of the veranda, which does not extend below the windows of the others," she explained.

"Hold the light just outside the door, but not in line with the window," directed her companion.

The girl obeyed; Jones went into the room and approached the window cautiously. The roof concealed the floor of the veranda below, but on the ground before the house were a group of men.

One held a torch, which lighted up the little company. There were six or seven; the gold braid on their jackets glistened in the rays of the flickering flame.

For a moment the soldier watched them. He saw that they were talking excitedly, and one, evidently a leader, was gesticulating with great violence. Stepping back a pace Jones dropped the barrel of the rifle across the window-sill and aimed carefully.

With the spurt of flame from the muzzle of the weapon the Mexican staggered and went down at the feet of his companions. Before the echo of the report had died Jones dropped the rifle and slammed to the heavy shutter, throwing the bolt in place.

"Now the other windows," said he tersely, "but keep out of line of them!"

There were four other openings in the front of the building; these he closed, and then entered the other rooms, bolting each shutter in place.

"Is there a veranda on this side; any roof on which they could climb?" he asked.

"No," said the girl, "but there is a shed at the farther end of the hall, and—"

A fusillade of shots came from outside; a crash, a cry from the hall below. Then a single report which roared through the house like the explosion of a bomb.

"Stay here!" Jones shouted, and was in the hall making for the stairs, cocking his rifle as he ran.

The light from the front room below revealed the situation which he feared.

The rear door was open and across its threshold surged a crowd of men. The old Indian lay stretched upon the floor, his limbs twitching convulsively.

His back to the light, blocking the entrance to the door of the front room, Jones raised his rifle and fired rapidly. A thick haze of pungent smoke filled the hall; several shots blazed out from the group in the doorway.

Jones dropped the useless rifle and emptied the chambers of his revolver at the surging mass of dark faces. Behind him a rifle cracked spitefully; it was Robinson pumping fresh shells into the magazine.

The fusillade cleared the doorway; the invaders seemed to melt away, swept backward by the storm of bullets. The haze of smoke began to clear, and on the ground outside several figures lay motionless; a wounded bandit, groaning, writhed on the threshold.

"Stop!" cried Jones, "save your ammunition!"

He went down the hall, staggering slightly, rolled the wounded Mexican outside and closed the door.

"The bolt is broken; bring something here!" he called. Then he swayed, caught at the wall and leaned against it heavily.

Robinson was it his side; behind, Señor Bilbao peered at them anxiously.

"You are hit?" the reporter asked excitedly.

"Yes," answered Jones; "it got me in the shoulder." He straightened up, teeth set. "Where is the boy?"

Bilbao called out in Spanish. From somewhere the young Mexican appeared, white faced, shaking.

"You did not fire," said Jones sternly; "when they broke in the door you ran away, and—your father is a brave man."

The boy began to whimper; he was only sixteen, and feared the Villistas as being devils without mercy.

"You are not really a coward, and you have seen how these bandits run before our fire. Do you fancy they will show you mercy when the time comes for a reckoning? We must hold them off until your father returns with the soldiers from the garrison; you have a rifle; a Mexican should know how to use it."

The boy straightened his shoulders.

"I am not a coward, *señor*," said he stoutly.

"Then go up-stairs, where the *señorita* is guarding the windows; will we tell your father that a girl was braver than you?"

Jones's face was white, beads of perspiration were gathering on his forehead. Across his left hand a tiny stream of blood began to trickle from the bullet hole in his upper arm.

The Mexican boy, rifle in hand, went up the stairs; Jones, leaning against the wall, swaying dizzily, clutched Robinson's arm tightly.

"Take me to the front room—and guard this door. There are three of us, and the *señorita* and the boy up-stairs," said he faintly.

With an effort, conquering the nausea, he went down the hall into the front room, felt blindly for a chair and sank into it.

"It is through the shoulder; have you any brandy handy?" he murmured, and gritted his teeth, fighting off the sickening dizziness.

Señor Bilbao opened a closet and poured out a glassful from a squat bottle. Jones swallowed the fiery liquor, coughed and smiled faintly.

"Rip up the sleeve and get a bandage; if we can stop the bleeding—" his voice trailed off into an incoherent murmur.

The *señor* hesitated; he was an old man, and his hands trembled. But with his knife he ripped up the sleeve of the canvas jacket.

An ugly hole, no larger than the end of a lead pencil, showed in the fleshy part of the wounded man's arm below the shoulder. Señor Bilbao had been a Mexican senator, he was a diplomat par excellence, but he felt his helplessness in the present crisis.

"Pepita!" he called—"Pepita!"

The girl appeared in the doorway. She saw her father standing irresolute beside the sagging figure. She saw the bared arm down which blood was trickling, the bullet hole, and the white face of the wounded American.

Quickly she crossed the room; Jones smiled faintly.

"It is nothing," said he, and lurched forward in the chair. Had she not caught him he would have fallen.

"A bandage! Why are you doing nothing?" she cried. Never before had she spoken so sharply to her father.

Bilbao looked helplessly around the room. The girl uttered an exclamation; unblushingly she loosened the band of her linen petticoat, letting the garment slip to the floor. She tore it into strips and, when there was enough, bound the wound tightly.

A shot crashed outside, and another bullet hole was registered in the panel of the heavy door. The girl went on calmly with her task, bandaging the wounded arm from shoulder to elbow.

The old Mexican, obeying a gesture, poured out another drink of brandy and held the glass to Jones's lips. But he did not drink; his head rested heavily against the girl's shoulder. His eyes were closed; he had drifted off into momentary unconsciousness.

A volley of shots crashed out again.

"We are lost!" cried the old Mexican. His face was whiter than that of the wounded man.

"We will trust in God, *mia padre*—in God and these brave Americans," the girl answered calmly.

Jones opened his eyes. Subconscious, he had heard the shots and his brain began to work again.

"Give me the rifle, and—go up-stairs—it is safer there, *señorita!*" said he faintly.

He got upon his feet, swaying dizzily, went to the table and began mechanically to thrust shells into the empty magazine. They saw him grit his teeth with pain, but he filled the magazine.

"Are you there, Robinson?" he called.

"Yes," answered the reporter from the hall.

"Guard the door—we can keep them off on this side!" muttered Jones dizzily.

The girl took the rifle from his hand.

"Give him the brandy!" she ordered sharply.

Jones drank, steadying himself against the table.

"Go up-stairs, and watch the windows there!" she commanded.

Señor Bilbao obeyed, leaving the two in

the front room and Robinson guarding the door in the rear.

III.

THE sun, creeping above the eastern horizon, revealed the distant mountain range, the stretches of green fields and the waste of desert. The first faint light reflected on the white walls of the cluster of buildings and on the wreck of the aeroplane, around which clustered a little group of cursing Villistas.

Six of their number lay dead; three, desperately wounded, lay upon the grass, making their peace with God.

They did not understand it, but the hated, despised gringoes, who had descended from the clouds, had proved to be devils who had held out successfully against a score of the choicest fighting men of Villa's band.

In the room over the veranda the blind of a window had been opened. Weak from loss of blood and the shock of his wound, Jones, aviator, leaned against the sash and looked down upon the now deserted space before the door. Below, in the hall, the reporter, heavy-eyed, but with every nerve alert, maintained his guard.

The sun crept higher, lighting up the plain. Jones turned his gaze anxiously toward the south, from which the expected aid must come from the Galeana garrison. If it did not come within a few hours he knew their case was hopeless; they might hold out during the day, for the bandits would not venture an attack until darkness would again cover their movements, but he understood another night must see the ending of the defense, especially should the Villistas receive reinforcements.

But no one appeared upon the desert toward the south. The boy, Francisco, entered the room silently with hot coffee, which, under the *señorita's* orders, a frightened Mexican woman had prepared. Jones drank the steaming beverage, set down the cup and returned to his vigil.

Where was Jose? Had he got through to Galeana? Would the garrison respond to his call for aid?

Then suddenly action sprang out of desolation; from somewhere a cry went up, piercing the keen morning air. And after the shout a shot, a long way off—another shot, a dozen, echoing across the plain.

Forgetting danger, and that a sniper might be lurking in the shadow of an outbuilding, the lieutenant leaned across the sill. He could see toward the north now, from which direction the shots seemed to come. He could look across the fields to the stranded aeroplane, around which clustered the group of bandits. And he could see beyond—and the sight which he saw almost stopped the beating of his heart.

A crowd of horsemen, riding in a cloud of dust, were approaching rapidly; the foremost were not so far off but he could distinguish that they were Mexicans. Now and then a little puff of smoke spurted out from among the riders—they were firing from the saddle—at something behind.

And, as he looked, the bandits around the aeroplane separated, watching the oncoming horsemen. The van was almost upon them, there were shouts, a tumult of cries and the Villistas on foot began to run toward the outbuildings. They, too, were shouting frantically, and now Jones could catch the words: "The gringoes — the gringoes are coming!"

Like a pack of frightened sheep the Mexicans fled across the field; and close behind, the desperate riders, urging their horses toward the south. Again reports rang out across the plain. There were two riderless mounts and two dark figures stretched on the grass.

The Villistas on foot scattered behind the outbuilding and disappeared, striving desperately to reach their steeds, which were picketed there. And the frenzied horsemen tore past the sheds, a hundred yards away, no longer turning in their saddles to fire, but each bending low as if to avoid a threatening blow.

But Jones no longer noticed them as dizzily he clung to the sill, leaning far out and looking toward the north. His gaze was riveted on a sight he could not comprehend.

These were not Carranza men speeding across the plain behind the fleeing bandits; that long line of riders, urging their horses onward, firing at the panic stricken Villistas. For the onrushing soldiers wore the dull khaki of Uncle Sam's boys—the polished scabbards which glistened in the sunlight sheathed the sabers of American cavalrymen—Uncle Sam's boys twenty miles across the border. What could it mean?

Jones grew faint and closed his eyes, clinging to the window-casing.

When he opened them again the khaki-clad troopers were swarming past the aeroplane, covering the field. And the Villistas were gone, fleeing across the desert toward the range of mountains to the south.

A bugle sounded shrilly; around the outbuilding the riders drew rein. A cloud of dust, fine as mist, arose around them and clung to their perspiring faces. Some were looking at the house—at Jones, leaning out of the window above the roof of the veranda.

He recognized an officer, waved his hand, stumbled down the stairs and with trembling fingers unbolted the front door.

"Robinson!" he cried, "*señorita—señor*—we are saved—it is my own command!"

The officer, followed by half a dozen troopers, had ridden up to the veranda. He looked at Jones searchingly.

"Good Heaven!" he cried, and slid out of the saddle.

His face was begrimed with the desert dust, his uniform stained with perspiration, he limped as he walked and rubbed the sweat from his eyes that he might see clearer.

"Jones!" he cried, as he mounted the steps—"well, I'll be damned!"

Then, after a little time, while they waited for the coffee which the *señorita* had gone to order, and he had heard Jones's story, he gave the explanation of his own presence on the scene.

The Villistas had attacked Columbus during the night; in the first moments of the surprise they had killed men, women and children, and then the boys had taken things in hand. Washington was too far away to wait for orders—the orders which might never have come. A little band, outnumbered three to one, had crossed the border, scattering before them Villa and his wolves.

"That's the whole story," said the major, polishing his glasses carefully on his coat-sleeve. "I'd like to follow them into the mountains yonder, but I guess we've done our share for one morning. We'll rest up a bit and get back again; I'm sorry you've lost your aeroplane, Jones, but those fellows have put it out of business. You'll have to come down to earth once more and travel like the rest of us."

"I'm glad to be able to say I'm on earth at all; last night it didn't look as if I'd stay there long," replied Jones, grinning.

He looked at Señor Bilbao and the girl.

"You will, of course, go back with us, for—" he grinned again—"I fancy you will not be popular with the Villistas, and you're pretty near their mountains yonder."

"I would not care to run away; that is, if I were alone, but—" The *señor* glanced at the girl, Pepita—"if the Villistas should return," he continued resignedly.

"Quite right!" said the major gravely; "we will start in about an hour."

The horses were standing in the open space before the house; the troopers were already mounted and the major was helping the girl and the old Mexican into their saddles. Jones, standing on the step of the veranda, turned to the boy, Francisco.

"Your father is a brave man, and I think he will return to you. Should he come back give him this advice from me: If he will come to Columbus I will see that he rejoin Señor Bilbao; he will understand."

Then to Robinson, who was waiting for him on the lawn:

"Give me a lift into the saddle, old man; you see one of my wings is almost out of business."

He nodded at his wounded arm, still bound from shoulder to elbow by strips torn from Pepita's petticoat.

His Isle of Refuge

by Fred C. Smale

CHAPTER I.

A BLUNT DEMAND.

THE camp-fire, encouraged by a few drops of petrol, shot up bravely under the trees, and caused its maker to leap back with something between a cough and an oath. Some twenty paces distant, his tall, lithe form silhouetted against a crimson sunset, stood a second man, his gaze intent on something in the lake below.

The man by the fire, having smothered the too-eager flames with a brush of green undergrowth, sat down with his back against a tree. With a contented sigh he drew forth a pipe and began stuffing in tobacco.

"What the deuce are you mooning about over there, Saville?" he observed in the drawling accents of a man who hardly expects a reply. "You look like Mephistopheles, red limelight and all. Come and be sociable. Smoke the pipe of peace."

The other started and gave a slow smile. The crimson glow in the western sky, now fading rapidly to amber and rose, lit up his face and glinted ruddily on the few buckles and buttons about his person, giving color to his comrade's suggestion.

They had pitched their camp almost on the edge of a bluff overlooking a lake and it was on the very margin of the former that Saville now stood. He lingered a little while longer until the amber and rose had faded to a mere bar of orange, where the outline of the distant woods across the lake met the sky. Then he too drew forth his pipe and struck a match.

Immediately in the gloom below there sprang into life an answering spark of light, tiny, instantaneous and silent, but enough. Saville gave a contented sigh. Then he stalked to the fire.

"Oh, you have come at last," grunted his companion. "Egad, I was all but asleep."

Saville made no reply but seated himself, also with his back to a tree, directly opposite the other. Then he stretched out a long leg and dexterously maneuvered the fire into a comfortable blaze, not fierce enough to be unpleasant, yet brisk enough to illumine the countenances of the men.

"Coulson Stanbury," said Saville suddenly, in the staccato accents of a man whose nerves are at high tension, and the other stiffened at the sound of his voice, "I have something to say to you."

The man addressed stared at him in surprise for a moment and then leaned back again with a little laugh which hardly rang true.

"Say away then," he returned. "We shall not be interrupted, I guess."

"No," replied Saville slowly, between whiffs of his pipe, "that is why I have put off this little talk until now."

He removed the pipe from his lips and thrust his face forward so that the firelight shone up at it and gave his features a fierce, contorted expression.

"A good idea, Stanbury, for you and I to come away here in the wilds alone, only you and I, eh! No—sit still!" and a crimson gleam showed where the polished barrel of a revolver hung level above the fire.

Coulson Stanbury, who had started forward, sank back once more, the false ruddiness of the light disguising the actual pallor of his face.

"You—Saville! Are you crazy?" he gasped. "Put down that thing, man. Surely you are not going to murder me!"

Saville smiled grimly, the revolver still winking steadily in front of him.

"Murder you, why no," said he. "That would be a fool trick. But you have got to sit still right there while I talk."

"Oh, I'll do that," returned Stanbury, "though what the mischief you are driving at I can't imagine."

Then Saville spoke, slowly and distinctly, as though he had rehearsed it all over many times beforehand, as indeed was the case.

"Coulson Stanbury, you are a rich man, a multi-millionaire, they told me back in New York, though you yourself never confessed to over a million or so, and men in your position usually distrust their fellow creatures to an amazing extent. Even now it almost puzzles me to know how you came to confide in me to this extent, to come here alone with me many hundred miles from any other human being.

"It seems that I must have played my part better than I thought. For playing a part I have been. You took me for one of your own kidney, an amasser of dollars, and a successful one at that.

"Well, after all, you were not entirely wrong. Our methods differ somewhat, that is all. I am fairly wealthy, and now I am going to be wealthier still, for I am going to bleed you for a cool million—now remember your promise!" and the red gleam moved ominously as Stanbury made an involuntary movement.

"I have not finished yet—scarcely begun, in fact," Saville went on. "It has just jumped into your mind that I am merely a low-down crook who has lured you here to hold you up in the good old-fashioned way. Well, it isn't quite like that. I had reasons besides mere—super-taxing you, shall we say? I will give you two of those reasons. You remember Davenport Lisle?"

Stanbury started.

"Is he at the back of this?"

"Ah, you do remember him! No, he knows nothing of this little operation of mine. He was a rich man, too, once upon a time, wasn't he? Not so rich as you, of course, but rich enough. The last time I saw him he was dying in a slum in New York, dying of fever, and lack of proper care and nourishment, but he had strength enough to curse the man who had brought him down, and curse him pretty heartily he did, I can assure you."

Stanbury made a husky noise which was meant for a laugh.

"That is nonsense," said he. "If one man makes money somebody else must lose it. Lisle was unlucky. I was the other thing, that is all it amounts to. Every poor devil who goes under curses the man who wins out. You know that as well as I do."

"I do know it," returned Saville, "and if that was all I should not have thought it worth mentioning. But you did more than that—you went to him when he was down and offered to put him on his feet again—at a price."

Stanbury gave a little gulp, and when he spoke again his voice trembled.

"If you believe all that Davenport Lisle told you," he said with a harsh laugh, "and I take it he pitched you some sort of yarn, you are a more credulous fool than I took you for."

Saville continued as though the other had not spoken:

"The price was the honor of his daughter—his only child, who was striving to support him and herself by giving swimming lessons in New York."

"It—it is a lie. I—I was in love with the girl, it is true," said Stanbury eagerly. There was fear in his eyes now.

"Love!" repeated Saville scornfully. "You forget our many talks since we came into the wilderness together, how you have spoken of women—all women. You have been very candid and confidential and I have got to know precisely the sort of soulless blackguard you are where women are concerned.

"You were equally frank with that poor devil Lisle. Good Lord, I wonder he kept his hands off you, weak as he was. Anyhow, I believe you had his opinion of you delivered pretty promptly — and you cleared out. The next day his landlord gave him twenty-four hours to quit, and sick and half-dead as he was, he and his daughter had to go."

"I swear—" began Stanbury, but Saville silenced him with a fierce gesture.

"And that was done at your instigation," he went on relentlessly. "Oh, I have had the proof. But it may interest you to know that Davenport Lisle is now in a sanatorium some hundreds of miles from New York. I don't suppose he will live long. He was too far gone for any hope of a permanent cure, but, at any rate, he will end his days in comfort."

"You put him there?"

"At your expense," answered Saville coolly. "I am presenting you with the bill soon. Now there is another matter —that of Mrs. Van Thrupp."

Coulson Stanbury's face grew suddenly livid.

"What in perdition have you to do with her?"

"Nothing much. My chief concern at the moment is with you, but some few days before you and I left New York Mrs. Van Thrupp took it into her pretty head to interview me with regard to a certain little matter."

"The fool! The cursed, empty-headed little fool!" burst out Stanbury, smiting his fists viciously on the ground. "I'll—"

He checked himself suddenly and stared across at Saville. It was quite dark now and a soughing wind began to rise among the tree-tops. The fire, slowly conquering the green brush, cast huge shadows which seemed to leap about the two men like goblins, mocking the one in his extremity and the other in his triumph.

But Coulson Stanbury had no eyes for these phantoms. He was fascinated by the play of light on the features of the man opposite him, making them those of a grotesque demon, fierce and mirthful by turns. Yet Stanbury knew it was only a mere illusion and that really Saville's face was as set and inscrutable as Fate itself.

"Out with it," he snarled, "and be quick. I am about fed up with this."

"Just so," replied Saville, with mock sympathy. "I can just imagine that. Well, I have not much more to say. Mrs. Van Thrupp informed that she had, very foolishly, she admitted, allowed you to lend her ten thousand dollars to pay certain gambling debts, which she did not wish to come to her husband's ears. After the transaction was completed, you, with that charming old-world chivalry of yours, proposed certain conditions.

"Mrs. Van Thrupp, being an honest wife as well as a foolish gambler, declined to entertain your gentlemanly proposals, whereupon you delicately suggested that her husband should be told all and asked to refund you the borrowed money. An old trick, or course. Rich men of your stamp play it every day. Mrs. Van Thrupp was to give you her final answer on your return from this expedition, and, in her despair, she poured out the whole story into my ears and implored me to use my influence with you on her behalf."

Saville now smiled sardonically.

"You see, I was supposed to have considerable weight with the great multi-millionaire," he added. "Well, perhaps those who thought so were not altogether in error. Anyhow, I promised Mrs. Van Thrupp that I would do my best."

"Oh, I'll give you a receipt for the ten thousand, if that's all," growled Stanbury. "I would have done it anyway. I was only giving the woman a lesson."

"Yes; but permit me to doubt that it was to be a gratis one," returned Saville. "Now we will sum up, if you don't mind. Lisle's case cost me two thousand dollars —it may possibly cost me more, but we will let that pass. With regard to Mrs. Van Thrupp, of course, I only want your receipt. Then there is, as I mentioned in the beginning, a million dollars for myself—I might make it pounds sterling—you see I am English myself—but we will call it dollars."

Stanbury leaped to his feet, regardless of the revolver now held level with his head, for Saville had followed his movements with lightning-like rapidity.

"A million dollars! I'll see you damned first!"

CHAPTER II.

TWO TO ONE.

"SIT down," ordered Saville sternly. "You asked me if I meant to murder you a while ago. I will ask you to remember that there is nothing to prevent my doing so, barring some slight reluctance on my part. Do not push that reluctance too far."

Stanbury stood undecided for a moment, then he sank back in his old position, whereupon Saville imitated him.

"But you are talking such infernal foolishness," growled Stanbury. "A million dollars! How could I give it to you even if I wanted to, here in this place?"

"We are coming to that," replied Saville. "I have a check-book with me. You can fill out a form, or you can give me a note of hand to your bankers. It is quite immaterial as far as I am concerned."

Stanbury stared at the speaker in amazement.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I begin to see how it is. You are mad—actually crazy. This solitude has got on your brain. Why, you'd have to get your check or whatever it was cashed, and where would I be meanwhile, do you think?"

"Here or hereabouts," was the reply.

"But—but," stammered Stanbury, "you have said that you do not intend to harm me."

"Neither I do, if you are sensible. Listen, I said just now that we were not within hundreds of miles of another human being. That is not quite true. Just below in the lake is a motor-boat. It has been brought here by a man whom I can trust. He received instructions to be at this spot by a given date. He has obeyed orders and he replied to my signal a little while ago when I lit my pipe over yonder.

"He will take me in the boat—after certain other arrangements have been carried out—and land me where I, or rather he, has a motor-car waiting. A few hours' drive will take me to the rail. Within twelve hours of leaving here I shall be in 'Frisco. If your check or whatever it is you give me is honored I shall immediately send a wire to a man in Carson City whom I have there awaiting instructions, and he will set off at once to you.

"If any difficulty confronts me as to obtaining the money, well, the wire will not be sent, and as even the man I speak of will not possess the remotest idea of your whereabouts, you can work out the result for yourself."

"Easy," replied Stanbury sullenly. "I'll have to work my way to the railroad alone."

"I am afraid it would hardly pan out just like that," said Saville, "because, you see, in the first place I shall leave you only sufficient food for a few days and no firearms to shoot anything; second, I shall plant you on an island."

"On an island?"

"In the lake—yes. There is a nice, convenient one about a couple of miles from here and the same distance from the shore in any direction. I know you cannot swim ten yards, so you see how things will stand.

"If all goes well and you play the straight game, you will simply suffer the inconvenience—if you look upon it as such—of camping alone for a few days. If, on the other hand, your bankers prove

obstinate I am afraid you will find yourself in something of an awkward fix. No gun, food run out, marooned on an island, and with not one chance in a thousand of being discovered—well, I won't pain you with fancy pictures. I guess you are wise enough to gage the situation for yourself."

Coulson Stanbury sat silent for some time, his somber eyes fixed on the glowing fire. He mentally cursed his folly in having been led into this trap.

Edward Saville was the last man in the world he would have suspected of treachery. All his talk, all his actions had gone to show him as a man utterly devoid of sentiment, a mere worldly dollar-hunter like Stanbury himself.

Now, when it was too late the multimillionaire recalled various intimate conversations in which he had given himself away to this seemingly sympathetic companion of his. He remembered when he had even referred scoffingly to Davenport Lisle himself and his daughter, without mentioning names it was true, but Saville must have known all the time.

And there was no way out, save by submitting to this monstrous demand! Stanbury could see that plainly. No way—save by a sudden turning of the tables on his foe.

He raised his eyes furtively. Saville was smoking gravely opposite, his half-closed eyes apparently fixed on vacancy. It occurred to Stanbury that he was dozing, or on the verge of it. There would never be a better chance than this.

Acting on a sudden impulse, Stanbury dashed his foot into the red embers and kicked up a smother of sparks and ashes in Saville's face. With the same impulse he leaped to his feet, uttering a cry of triumph.

It died away in a snarl of baffled rage as Stanbury felt himself seized from behind in a bear-like embrace by a pair of arms that felt like bars of steel.

"Good Andrew," came Saville's mocking voice. "You arrived like the god out of the car—or the motor-boat. Hold him tight until I get these infernal ashes out of my eyes. I didn't think he had the sand to buck like that, confound him!"

Coulson Stanbury writhed and cursed, but the big man held him with scarcely an effort, and presently the struggling captive subsided and remained inert.

"I'm beat!" he gasped. "Two to one! Oh, you are a plucky pair of thugs!"

Saville smiled and maneuvered the scattered fire into a blaze once more.

"I think we will get our little business done now," said he crisply. "How are you going to give it — note or check? Quite immaterial to me, you know, as long as it gets across. I have explained to you what will happen if it doesn't."

"I will give you a note—and a check," said Stanbury sullenly. "Carmichael would never cash you either alone, I fancy, without communicating with me first. I'll have to put it so that he will be convinced that everything is O. K., but it will take some doing."

"Exactly," returned Saville. "I am glad you have come to look at the matter sensibly. You may let him go now, Andrew, but keep him covered. Here is paper, a fountain-pen, and my grip to write on. Fire away. I leave it to you to make it as convincing as you can."

Stanbury took the proffered articles and sank on one knee in order to catch the firelight.

"A lamp from the boat would have been better," said Saville, "but I dare say you can manage. Take your time and make a neat job of it. We don't want it to look as though you had written it under duress, as the lawyers call it, I believe."

For a quarter of an hour nothing was audible save the sighing of the wind in the pines above, the faint crackle of the fire and steady scratching of the pen.

It formed a curious scene, Stanbury kneeling and writing busily, huge Andrew Trail silent and watchful at his back, and Saville standing alertly observant, a triumphant gleam in his eyes, with the red glow of the fire over all.

"There you are," growled Stanbury at

last, tossing the paper at Saville's feet, "but I'll be even with you yet, curse you!"

"That is not a discreet remark for a man in your position," observed Saville, picking up the paper. "But we will overlook your natural feeling of resentment. Of course you will try and run me down afterwards. That's all in the game, isn't it, Andrew?"

A dry chuckle came from behind Stanbury.

"You can bet your life I'll have a try," he said grimly.

"Just so," observed Saville. "Now let us see what kind of a yarn you have pitched."

He knelt by the fire in his turn and read. Then he laughed.

"Good! A big deal in partnership with the bearer—Mr. Edward Saville—discovery of gold—urgent need of funds immediately—refer New York—yes, that seems feasible enough—with your signature. There is only one thing. You make it a million dollars only. You forget the two thousand in Lisle's case, but you can write a separate check for that—all the better, perhaps; it will make the whole thing look more genuine."

He held a blank form to the still kneeling man. Stanbury seemed about to protest, but he appeared to think better of it, and filled out the form, his jaw firmly set.

"You are right," said Saville, who was watching him closely. "A couple of thousand more or less will make no difference in the end."

"No," returned Coulson Stanbury in a strangely harsh tone, "you are right. It will make no difference—in the end."

"You mean he laughs longest who laughs last," said Saville pleasantly, as he took the check. "Of course that is so. Now it only remains for you to accompany us on a little journey, then we part. Andrew will lead the way to the boat—he can see in the dark. You will follow in his footsteps whilst I—and my revolver—will bring up in the rear."

It really did seem as though Andrew Trail had the eyes of a cat, for he never hesitated during the somewhat intricate journey which brought them to the motor-boat.

Stanbury was morosely silent and Saville made no attempt at conversation. The boat chugged out into the darkness, and some half an hour later its bow scraped gently on a gravelly beach.

"Here we are, Robinson Crusoe," said Saville gaily. "Show a glim, Andrew."

Stanbury hesitated an instant, then sprang ashore. The lantern revealed a little sandy cove with tall vegetation growing almost to the water's edge.

"Here is your provender," said Saville, lifting a heavy hamper over the side. "It includes better fare than we have been living on for the past week or two. You will find everything there, matches, tobacco, brandy, whisky, and one or two drugs—not that you will be likely to need the latter. You are a fairly healthy brute and there is no miasma here.

"Here are some books, too, if you feel like reading. Then here is our bell-tent; you'll be glad of that, and I have no further use for it. If all goes well you may expect relief in about four days. Oh, and by the way, have you any cash on you?"

"I have a couple of hundred dollars in notes," replied Stanbury. "Do you want them as well?" he added sarcastically.

"No, but the man who comes to fetch you will expect half of it, and he won't take you off until you pay up. If you hadn't had your fare I'd have given it to you. Now is there anything else you'd like to say before we part?"

Stanbury stepped forward within the radius of light.

"I would just like to know your real reason for playing this game on me," said he.

Saville was standing at the side of the boat lighting his pipe. His eyes glinted across at his questioner.

"A million dollars haul," said he, "seems a fairly good reason in itself."

"Not for you," returned Stanbury. "You might have made as much in New York—you did make a good deal as it was

—by following my pointers. This is your gratitude, I suppose."

Saville's pipe was well alight now. He looked at Stanbury squarely.

"I had another reason besides the dollars," said he. "You are right there. You can put in the next four days guessing what it is for yourself."

"What if I can guess it now?" retorted Stanbury with a sneer.

Saville's face changed, and he thrust it forward savagely.

"Then, by God, you had best keep your guess to yourself," said he. "For if you happened to hit on the right one I'd leave you with a bloody skin to heal. Away with her, Andrew!"

The little boat glided off into the darkness. Stanbury stood listening to the receding "chug-chug" until it died away in the distance; then he sent a fervent curse after it.

"Yes, Ned Saville, I can guess all right," said he. "And once back in New York I will see that she who gave you your reason shall furnish me with my revenge. Want Ellen Lisle for yourself, do you? Well, Coulson Stanbury will have a word to say to that!"

CHAPTER III.

THE COLUMBIAN BANK.

MR. DONALD CARMICHAEL, president of the Columbian Bank, San Francisco, was a dry, hard Scotsman, who almost suspected his own integrity, and seemed to pass his words through a testing machine before uttering them.

He sat in his private room on the third floor of the Columbian Building, and looked at the card which a clerk had brought him as though he half-expected it to explode.

"Mr. Edward Saville," he read slowly. "Never heard the name in my life, that I know of."

"He says that he is the bearer of an important communication from Mr. Coulson Stanbury of New York, sir."

A slight expression of relief flickered over the dry face.

"Oh, Stanbury! Well, that ought to be good enough. You may send him up—but first give me the signature-book."

The clerk went out, and in a few moments reappeared with the desired volume.

Mr. Carmichael found Coulson Stanbury's signature and sat studying it closely until every line and curve was photographed on his brain. Then he put the book away in a drawer and waited motionlessly, his hands clasped on the table and his thin lips set.

Saville had considered long and carefully over his manner of approach. He thought he knew the type of man he had to deal with, and on the whole he preferred Scotch cautiousness to the more genial and apparently happy-go-lucky American specimen, which sizes you up from behind a laugh and uses jokes to bait a trap. Saville had had experience of both.

He had never met Donald Carmichael, but he had got Coulson Stanbury to talk about him on many occasions, and had carefully noted all he had heard. Carmichael would be suspicious, of course. It was his business to inspect every stranger, no matter how genuine he might seem to be, and he would be tenfold on his guard when it came to parting with the immense sum which it was Saville's purpose to draw.

However, he held strong cards, and he felt fairly confident of winning out.

There was nothing of the crook about Saville, as far as appearance went. His nose was somewhat hawklike, it was true, but that was a familiar characteristic in the financial world, and in itself would scarcely arouse doubts.

His strong, clean-shaven face was bronzed with recent weeks of open-air exercise, and his sleek, dark hair, brushed straight back from his forehead, gave his countenance a certain expression of openness and candor. He was dressed quietly, and had assiduously practised a slight—a very slight—Scotch accent.

He entered the president's sanctum with

an air in which deference and embarrassment were artistically blended.

"Mr. Carmichael?" he began interrogatively.

The president's keen eye darted over the speaker from head to foot, then up again at the smiling face.

"Yes," he said briefly, and motioned his visitor to a chair where the light from the window fell directly on his features.

Saville appreciated the point and made no attempt to avoid full scrutiny.

"You have a letter for me from Mr. Coulson Stanbury, my clerk tells me," observed the Scotsman.

Saville made a slight grimace.

"I have, sir," he replied, "and a queer communication you will find it, I am thinking."

And he handed across the missive which the multi-millionaire had written by the light of the campfire.

The bank president took it with an immovable countenance, and taking a slender cutter methodically slit the envelope. Saville leaned back and watched with an expression of amused curiosity.

Donald Carmichael's face betrayed no sign as he read, then his glance shot over the top of the sheet at Saville, who laughed quietly.

"Well," said the latter, "rather a tall order, isn't it?"

"It certainly is somewhat extraordinary. I take it that you are aware of the contents of this letter—er—Mr. Saville?"

"Perfectly. I was with Mr. Stanbury when he wrote it," was the ready response.

Then the little smile passed from Saville's face and in its place came an expression of businesslike gravity.

"I know it must seem rather queer to you, Mr. Carmichael," said he earnestly. "I told Stanbury I'd have the biggest job to convince you that everything was O. K., but he seemed to think I should have no difficulty. 'There is my signature,' said he; 'what more can you—or he—want, and of course you can explain.' "

"And can you?" put in the Scotsman dryly.

Saville braced himself to score his first trick in the game, but his face betrayed only a slightly troubled diffidence.

"I'll explain all I can," said he. "And if it does not satisfy you—well, you must take the responsibility" — "responsibeelity," he pronounced it.

Saville drew forward his chair and glanced over his shoulder, as though to make sure that the door was closed.

"You see, it is like this, Mr. Carmichael," he said in a low tone. "Mr. Stanbury and I left New York some four weeks ago on a hunting expedition—you can easily verify that, at any rate. He had got a bit sick of cities, and I had had enough of them, too, for a time. We both wanted to get as far away from Wall Street as we could—right away in the wilds. Well, we drifted west until we got into some very wild country, indeed—entirely new ground to both of us, and new to most people, I guess—and there we struck a find—a bonanza."

Saville paused; Carmichael glanced at the letter.

"Gold?" said he.

Saville nodded.

"Yes, he mentions it, doesn't he? Well, it is a bonanza, and I should say a big one, though I am no mining expert. I am not at liberty to tell you where it is, but the peculiarity of it is that any one else may happen along and jump our claim if we are not wary.

"After long discussion we decided that he—Stanbury—should remain there, and I should come to you, obtain sufficient funds for machinery and labor right away —in short, make ourselves secure at once."

"Why did not Mr. Stanbury come himself, and you stay behind?" shot out the question.

Saville had expected that, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"There you put up a hard one," said he. "I pressed that very point, but I could not persuade him. 'You will have to come anyway,' said I. 'Even your signature won't be good enough under the circumstances. It is not as though it were a

mere thousand dollars or so in question. A million is a big sum.' "

Carmichael nodded, but remained silent.

"Then," continued Saville, "Mr. Stanbury got somewhat riled, I am sorry to say. 'If Carmichael doesn't choose to honor my—' but there, I needn't tell you just what he said. I dare say you know Mr. Stanbury as well as I do. He isn't particular when he is opposed in any way."

"Still," persisted the bank president, "I do not see the point in his sending you when he could have come himself."

Saville gave a helpless little shrug.

"To tell you the truth," said he, "I don't think he was able to drag himself away from the spot. He is a tenacious sort, you know, and what he had got his hooks in he wasn't going to let loose again if there was any possible alternative.

"However, there you are, that is the whole story, or as much of it as I am at liberty to tell you, and of course it is for you to say whether he must come personally—but it is only right that I should tell you this much," added Saville impressively. "If you do make him come to 'Frisco just now, Mr. Carmichael, he will draw not only that million, but all the rest of his investments in the Columbian, whatever they happen to be — he swore he would do that."

Donald Carmichael knit his brows.

"Of course, that was a fool threat," went on Saville hastily, "and I do not suppose that he would carry it out. It would be deucedly unfair to you if he did, but he said it as though he really meant it. I thought it my duty to tell you, anyway."

The president sat reflecting silently for some moments. If things were really as this apparently candid stranger said, it would be unwise to offend Coulson Stanbury. He was a man of considerable weight in financial circles, and his withdrawal of business from the Columbian would be a staggering blow to the bank, inasmuch as it would probably lead to the loss of other important clients.

Saville seemed able to read what was passing in the other's mind, and he waited to let his warning soak in before he played his next card.

"Of course you are quite at liberty to wire to New York for references concerning myself," said he. "I can hardly expect you to pay over without due consideration and taking certain precautions, even though you have Mr. Stanbury's instructions there in his own writing."

Mr. Carmichael roused himself from his reverie.

"I may say at once, Mr. Saville, that I am convinced of the genuineness of Mr. Stanbury's letter. As to your own *bona-fides*, I presume you have some one well known to us who can identify you as being who and what you assert yourself to be?"

"Certainly," replied Saville promptly. "Mr. George Cordwainer of the Palantic Hotel was much in the company of Mr. Stanbury and myself in New York about six weeks ago. Will he do?"

Mr. Donald Carmichael's face brightened for the first time.

"Excellently," said he. "Mr. Cordwainer is a client of ours, and I should take no man's word more readily."

"Good!" exclaimed Saville briskly. "I will bring him here at once if he is disengaged. Of course, I foresaw that something of the sort would be necessary. Mr. Stanbury suggested the name himself—in fact, it occurred to both of us simultaneously. I am staying at the Palantic and—"

A knock had sounded on the door.

"Yes," said Mr. Carmichael sharply.

The clerk appeared.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, "a telegram."

The president picked up his cutter and slit the envelope. It was said that Donald Carmichael never tore open an envelope in his life. He read the telegram with the face of a graven image.

"It is from Mr. Coulson Stanbury," said he.

"Ah, changed his plans?" asked Saville interestedly.

"It is sent from Carson—you had better read it for yourself—no answer, Bentley."

The clerk disappeared and the door

closed again. Saville read the message, half to himself:

> If any difficulty, hunt up General V., who, I believe, is in 'Frisco. He will convince of S.'s bona fides. Thought of this after S. left and sent off messenger.
>
> STANBURY.

Saville looked up as he finished reading.

"Of course," he said thoughtfully. "Funny it never occurred to us."

"Who is General V.?" asked Carmichael.

"General Vyner. British Army man, now retired."

"What, *the* Vyner—Vyner, V. C.?"

"Vyner, V. C.," assented Saville. "Stanbury and I knew him well in New York. I remember perfectly well now that he spoke of coming here when we were speaking of our proposed expedition — in fact, if it hadn't been that he had his wife with him I believe he would have joined us, though he isn't a young man now—tough old boy, though! If he really is in the city that should make things quite easy."

"One moment," interposed Carmichael, and pressed a knob on his table.

A messenger-boy appeared.

"Bring me the morning *Newsletter*," said the president.

With the paper before him he turned to the list of arrivals, Saville watching interestedly.

"Yes," said Carmichael at last. "General Vyner, V. C., and Mrs. Vyner. From Yosemite. Fremont Hotel."

"Bravo!" cried Saville. "Will you come with me and see him? The Fremont is only four or five blocks away. Seems rather much to ask him to come here on my account, though I have no doubt he would do it like a bird. He is a genial old sport enough. Still I would rather—"

"I will come with you at once," put in Donald Carmichael, rising, "and we can take in Cordwainer on our way back. I hope you do not think me unduly suspicious—or careful, I should say—Mr. Saville," he added, half apologetically, "but I am sure you quite understand as a business man—"

"My dear sir," interrupted Saville heartily, "please don't mention it. I should have thought you a queer bank president if you did not act as you are doing. As I told Stanbury, his letter was right enough as far as it went, but then it might have been written with a gun at his head, for all you could say."

"Just so," said Carmichael gravely. "To be quite candid with you, that very idea did occur to me. Millionaires get into curious positions at times.'

"That is a fact," returned Saville promptly. "Well, I am mighty glad of that wire. It came just at the right moment. By the way, I should take care of it, with Stanbury's letter, if I were you. One never knows what may happen, and of course I have myself to think of. It is a bit of a responsibility.

Carmichael nodded.

"Exactly so. I quite appreciate your position, Mr. Saville. You may trust me to see to that. Now a few words with the two men we are going to see should put matters quite straight," and Saville thrilled with a sense of coming victory.

CHAPTER IV.

IN SIGHT OF VICTORY.

SAVILLE and the president of the Columbian Bank parted at the corner of Market and Fourth Streets. As soon as the stiff-backed Scotsman was out of sight Saville dived for the nearest saloon and clamored for brandy.

He was not a drinking man, but the strain of the past two hours called for stimulant. They had found both General Vyner and Cordwainer and the result had exceeded Saville's most sanguine expectations.

The hotel proprietor had been heartily familiar, and the V. C., if not quite so free in manner, had at any rate greeted Saville with a sufficiently genial cordiality which banished any lingering doubts which Carmichael might have retained as to his companion's identity and genuineness.

The introduction of General Vyner into the scheme had been a sudden inspiration of Saville's. He had seen the papers early that morning; in fact, his first action on reaching San Francisco was to consult the arrivals list. There he had discovered the general's presence in the city, and he determined to play that unconscious warrior as a further strong card.

Waiting in Carson City was one Baldy Malone, a New York unworthy whom Saville owned body and soul. He it was whose duty it would be to rescue Coulson Stanbury at the proper time.

To this Baldy Malone Saville straightway wired a long message in a cipher prearranged between them. The telegram so opportunely received by Carmichael was the result.

The general had unwittingly clinched the matter by inviting Saville and Carmichael to dine with him that evening. Both men, however, politely declined, Carmichael on the excuse of his living at Oakland and fear of night damp, and Saville on the score of business matters.

Of course, neither Cordwainer nor General Vyner was told of the precise reasons why they were asked to identify Saville, and they were under the impression that it was merely a trifling formality in connection with business. They both knew that Saville had left New York in company with Coulson Stanbury, however, and some fencing was necessary to explain Saville's presence in San Francisco alone.

In this Donald Carmichael aided, and Saville found no difficulty there.

Carmichael, Scottish to the last, and unknown to Saville, did indeed make sure that General Vyner was General Vyner and no one else by means of a brief series of telegrams between New York and San Francisco, but probably the testimony of Cordwainer, whom Carmichael had known for twenty years, would alone have been sufficient to satisfy the bank president.

A brief private conversation between the two, in the way of which Saville had been careful to place no obstacles, convinced Carmichael, beyond any shadow of doubt, that Coulson Stanbury and Saville had been on most intimate terms in New York, and, moreover, that the latter was known to be a man of considerable means on his own account.

This had really put Carmichael's mind quite at ease, and his subsequent inquiries were merely for future reference, in case Stanbury found reason to regret the impulsive steps he was taking and tried to throw the blame on others. The Columbian Bank had had experiences of that sort in its time.

But everything appeared decidedly O. K., and there remained only to pay over to Saville the sum demanded. At the very last moment Saville had produced the check for the two thousand dollars on Davenport Lisle's account, saying, what was really true, that he had forgotten it until then, and Carmichael authorized its payment without demur. The million dollars, of course, was a slightly different matter.

"You say you want it in specie—gold," said Carmichael, "not in notes. Well, gold is the usual currency out here in the West, but it will be a big lump for you to cart about, Mr. Saville—notes would be much handier."

"I have to go by Mr. Stanbury's instructions," returned Saville a little curtly, "and he said gold. As to the inconvenience—well, that is my lookout, isn't it?"

He felt that the moment had come to display a little impatience, and the effect had been satisfactory and immediate. He was to call at the Columbian Bank in two hours' time and receive the money.

"We haven't that amount on the premises at the moment," Carmichael explained, "but the government Treasury is within a couple of blocks—and there is always the Mint," he added, with cumbrous Caledonian humor.

And on this he and Saville had parted.

During the interval the latter got busy.

Although he felt quite sure that the bank president no longer suspected him, Saville took no risks. For all he knew he might be watched, and his first step was to

go openly and pay deposit money for a private railway car to New York, to start the following morning, though he had not the slightest intention of going East. This done, he strolled out to the water-front.

He could discover no sign of his being shadowed, but it was by a very devious route that he at last arrived at a small restaurant near the custom house.

Almost on his heels there entered a big, grizzled man of seagoing appearance. The place was fairly full, and Saville, after a quick glance around, selected a table rather apart from the others in a recess, and the burly mariner, with apparent aimlessness, drifted in the same direction and dropped into a chair opposite Saville, who, without taking any notice of his table-companion, ordered lunch.

The man opposite him did the same. Then, when the waiter had gone the eyes of the two men met.

"All goes well, Andrew," said Saville in a low tone, picking up a newspaper.

Any one observing the pair would have said they were holding no communication whatever.

"That's good, sir," replied Andrew Trail with relief in his tone.

"The stuff will be ready for you at seven this evening. You will be at the corner of Kearney and Commercial Streets precisely at that hour for our first meeting. Each time I will give you the next rendezvous. You will take everything I give you straight on board the Benmore, returning with the empty bag each time—you understand?"

Saville said all this in a low tone without looking up from his paper.

"Perfectly, sir—here's the waiter."

They said no more to each other until the man had gone, then, over their food, it was easy to resume.

"Four, or at the most five, journeys ought to do it," said Saville. "I take it that the Benmore is ready?"

"Down to the last nut in the engines, sir. Schwartz has done well. We are cleared, and can start at any moment."

"Good. I leave by the South Pacific immediately after we finish to-night. You will cast off as early in the morning as is convenient and make south, awaiting me off Point Gorda, where I hope to arrive about dawn of the day after to-morrow. Keep a sharp lookout. I shall be in the boat, of course."

Andrew Trail nodded.

"I'll not miss you, sir, if you are there."

"If I am not there I shall be either dead or in the penitentiary," said Saville grimly, but the older man frowned.

"You will win out, sir," he observed. "I don't see how anything can go wrong now."

Saville shrugged his shoulders.

"One never knows," said he. "Now how about the Frenchman?"

"Foularde?"

Saville knit his brows in his turn.

"Yes—but no names."

"He is on board in the seventh heaven of delight."

"Doesn't he ask questions?"

"Scores," responded Trail, "or rather he did before I put a stop to it. I gave him to understand that if he meant to be curious he would lose his chance of that job you promised him. He has been mute enough since."

"And all the more curious, no doubt," commented Saville musingly. "I dislike the idea of having the fellow with us at all, but he is a clever engineer, it seems, and a clever engineer is the very man I want. But being no fool, he ought to know which side his bread is buttered. He lies low, of course?"

Andrew Trail's weatherbeaten face relaxed slightly.

"Hasn't ventured to put his nose outside his cabin, so Schwartz tells me. He's got no notion of seeing the inside of the cooler."

"Gun-play, wasn't it?"

"Stabbing," replied Trail, with Anglo-Saxon contempt for Latin methods. "Jabbed his knife into a man in one of those South Side dives."

"Ah! You have taken away his carver?"

"I believe Schwartz did. But he won't

try and carve any of us. He is as grateful as a shoeblack for a dollar."

"And about as clean handed, I guess, if one could only know his record. Well, bring him along with you. If he does get asking things, you know what to tell him —scientific inventions, secret machinery, and so on—that is, if you have to tell him anything."

"I know, sir."

"And now we will have one drink to success, Andrew. Then I must be going, I have one or two more things to fix up yet. Order your own lotion; there's the money."

A minute later each raised his glass and drank in silence; then Saville left the restaurant, as he had entered it, alone.

CHAPTER V.

GETTING AWAY WITH IT.

PUNCTUALLY at the appointed hour Saville presented himself in a taxicab at the Columbian Bank accompanied by two strong brass-bound boxes. Donald Carmichael was awaiting him and observed the boxes curiously as they were brought in.

"I was just wondering how you were going to manage," said he. "It amounts to over four hundredweight in all."

"Quite so," replied Saville coolly. "Stanbury and I calculated it out beforehand and I went to a place directly I left you and got them to fix up these boxes right away."

The two boxes were speedily filled in an inner office.

"Now," said Saville, "I'll ask you to seal these with the bank seal, Mr. Carmichael. Of course, I know everything is O. K., but I have to hand it over to Mr. Stanbury."

"It shall be done," replied the president; "but, of course, our responsibility ends on your giving us your receipt."

"Quite so," said Saville, with immobile face, though his sense of humor was tickled greatly. Mr. Donald Carmichael would find later on that his responsibility had only just begun!

When the boxes were locked and sealed the president took Saville aside.

"There are some queer characters in San Francisco," said he. "And those boxes will quite probably be noticed as they are taken out, even if they have not already attracted undesirable attention. Now, a couple of my clerks—" he paused meaningly.

"A very good idea," responded Saville. "I am much obliged to you, Mr. Carmichael. By all means let two of your men come to the Palantic with me. It will be a tight fit in the taxi with the boxes, but it isn't far. Of course I'll get Cordwainer to put them in his strong-room tonight. I would have let them remain here, only you see I am off in the morning—and I don't mind telling you I am not going to cart those boxes about openly—they look a bit too wealthy. They will be put in ordinary trunks and packed around with clothing and the like. Fortunately there are no customs to pass between here and—where I am going."

"Capital," returned Carmichael, rubbing his hands together softly. "I see you know your way about, Mr. Saville. All the same I shall be glad to hear that you have reached Mr. Stanbury safely. A million dollars is somewhat of a responsibility. Men have lost their lives for a very small fraction of that sum."

Saville laughed. "I will be careful," said he, "and I travel heeled."

He tapped his hip significantly.

"Well, good-by, Mr. Carmichael. I am sure I am very much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken, but I guess Mr. Stanbury will express his own feelings in the matter when he meets you."

For the life of him Saville could not resist this ironical touch, though his wiser self told him it was indiscreet, but the bank president shook hands with him warmly and the boxes were conveyed to the waiting taxi-cab.

The chauffeur eyed them curiously, and when the two clerks followed Saville into

his vehicle he made a sarcastic remark as to the weight-limit.

"That's all right, bo," said Saville cheerily. "You'll smile when we part."

Twenty minutes later the boxes were in Saville's room at the Palantic, and, locking the door, he stood regarding his booty with a triumphant eye.

"So far so good," said he softly. "Nine points of the law to me, anyway. Now I've got to get busy once more."

It was a murky afternoon and the thick, foggy drizzle characteristic of San Francisco was blowing in from the sea. Saville glanced out of his window with an approving nod. It would be dark early that evening.

He ruthlessly broke the seal on one of the boxes and, unlocking it, raised the lid. Then he packed into a moderate-sized portmanteau as many of the paper bags of coins as it would hold, which was about one-quarter of the boxful.

Saville frowned slightly.

"It will have to be two at a time," he muttered, "but I don't suppose anybody will pay any particular heed. I might be a drummer for all they know."

He filled a second bag and then threw himself on the bed, where he remained for over an hour.

It was now close upon six o'clock. Saville left the room, carefully locking the door after him, and made his way unostentatiously to the huge dining-saloon, where, ensconced in a corner well out of sight, he ordered a light repast.

He had no desire to run against Mr. Cordwainer just then. His meal over, he returned to his bedroom.

"A quarter to seven," he muttered. "I think I may venture now."

Taking the two bags, he left the room once more. He avoided the elevator and passed down the stairs and through the vestibule with a light, brisk step.

Any casual observer would have supposed his burden to be a light one, but the muscles of Saville's arms and shoulders ached with the effort which he put forth to feign buoyancy.

He found Andrew Trail at the appointed spot—with one portmanteau. The exchange was made swiftly.

"Bring back both bags," muttered Saville. "Clementina and Fifth Street."

Their various rendezvous had been all prearranged, but not in their precise order—that Saville decided as they went. On his way back to the hotel he stepped into a store and bought another bag about the same size as the one he had. Then he returned to the Palantic and entered with the air of having forgotten something.

It was the work of a few minutes only to fill the bags as he had done before. Again he left and at the fresh meeting-place the first maneuver was repeated. Twice more the perspiring Saville sallied forth from the hotel to be met by the no less industrious Andrew Trail, and at last almost exhausted he stood in his room panting and exultant.

The two boxes were still there, it was true, and full, but instead of good American dollars, they contained a select assortment of flint stones and scrap iron. Saville had made his return journeys "in ballast," as he humorously termed it.

After a brief breathing interval he stuffed some wads of newspaper atop and locked the boxes once more. To imitate the bank seal presented no insuperable difficulty, and at last Saville stood back and proudly surveyed his handiwork.

"Good enough for old man Carmichael himself," he observed softly, "but I guess they'll not be opened until Stanbury turns up and the storm breaks. Now for the next move."

Saville hunted up Mr. George Cordwainer in his private office.

"See here," said he to the hotel proprietor, "you know something of what is on with regard to me and the Columbian, I guess?"

The other grinned.

"Sure," he replied. "You have drawn a heap of bucks and you are taking it to Stanbury. I saw you lug it into the lift myself a few hours ago. I only trust that no smart crooks saw it as well. I've got no

use for that sort in the Palantic and I hope they'll not raid it to-night. Candidly, Mr. Saville, I wish you and your little boxes were in Peru. Why the deuce didn't you leave it all at the bank until you flitted?"

Saville laughed.

"I'll be gone in the morning," said he. "In the mean time—"

"You want your stuff put in the ice-box," interrupted Cordwainer. "Of course you do. I was only just wondering why I hadn't heard from you before. Seemed a silly thing to me you didn't have it put there right away."

"I had my reasons," replied Saville, "but now I would be glad if you would see to it personally with me. You see there's nobody about just now."

"That's true. I'll get a couple of porters at once."

The boxes were duly deposited in the Palantic's strong-room and Saville received a receipt which he placed in his pocket-book with extreme care.

"And now," said he, "I am dining *à la carte*, old man, all the way from the big P. of Palantic to the printer's name at the bottom."

Something in the ring of Saville's voice made Cordwainer look at him curiously.

"Didn't catch any touch of fever back there in the woods, did you?" he asked. "Swampy parts some of it, and your eyes look too bright to please me."

Saville took hold of himself. He must not betray himself at the eleventh hour.

"Oh, I am feeling right enough," he replied. "It is only relief at having got over a stiff job. Stanbury put up a pretty hard one on me. No wonder I'm feeling what old Carmichael would call 'fey.'"

But he kept rein on himself after that, not that he regretted having displayed a little excitement. It would all fit in with the game he was playing.

He dined and dined well, even if he did not sample the whole *menu* as he had threatened, but he strictly abstained from strong waters. He knew that in his present highly strung state it would take very little to make him thoroughly intoxicated.

After dinner he met the proprietor again.

"Feeling better?" asked that gentleman genially.

Saville was the great multi-millionaire's trusted confidant, and Mr. Cordwainer considered him worth considering.

"Good as gold," returned Saville, who had on hat and overcoat. "I may not see you in the morning. I am going out by the nine, so I'll say good-by, in case."

"I have got to see you and your blessed cargo off, if it is by the naught A. M.," grumbled Cordwainer half-jestingly. "Don't you fear—and what is more, I shall be mighty glad to hear you are safe at the other end of your journey—wherever it is—somewhere up Humboldt way, isn't it?"

Saville winked. "That's tellin's," he replied playfully as he lit a cigar.

Cordwainer grunted.

"Struck some bonanza, haven't you, you and Stanbury? Well, *adios*, if I shouldn't see you—but I shall in the morning, sure."

"If you count on that, you'll sure be disappointed," muttered Saville to himself. "So Carmy has given you a friendly tip, has he—and I thought he was Scotch."

He left the hotel and was swallowed up in the murky gloom. He made one call—at a telegraph office—and then went directly to the terminus of the Southern Pacific Railway.

CHAPTER VI.

A MILLIONAIRE MAROONED.

COULSON STANBURY stood on the little sandy shore listening for some minutes after the sound of the motor-boat had died away, then he turned with a shiver. He was alone, marooned on this little clod of an island, left powerless while the man who had betrayed him went and robbed him of a million dollars!

Some men might have fallen into a frenzy of impotent rage under the circumstances, but Coulson Stanbury had had the cards stacked against him on many previous occasions, and more than once had

wrenched a tardy victory from his opponent when the situation had seemed hopeless. He might do so yet in this case.

That Saville would succeed in obtaining the money Stanbury had small doubt. The latter had great respect for his enemy's histrionic powers, and considering all the cards which he held, it seemed that Carmichael would be induced to pay over.

But Coulson Stanbury's mind ran on something other than the probable loss of a million dollars. It was a large sum, it was true, but there was a matter which rankled even more than the apparently successful raid on his treasury.

It was not altogether a lie that Stanbury had uttered when he told Saville that he was in love with Ellen Lisle. He was as genuinely in love as a man of his type could be. Had Davenport Lisle and his daughter yielded to Stanbury's vile suggestions, probably he would have tired of the girl in a few weeks, but the very obstacles which confronted him in the fury of the father and the contemptuous scorn of the girl fed his desire and he had even contemplated marriage with Ellen Lisle.

Now this treacherous thief Saville had destroyed all Stanbury's hold on the Lisles, and, as the millionaire more than suspected, had his eye on the girl for himself.

Stanbury could show them that their benefactor was a mere rascally crook. Of course, in fact, that would be public knowledge very soon, but feminine nature was a contrary thing, and Saville would probably gain rather than lose ground in Ellen Lisle's estimation, especially when she learned that Stanbury was his latest dupe.

But the millionaire did not propose to advertise the fact that he had fallen so easily into Saville's trap. His friends and certainly his enemies would have the laugh.

He—Coulson Stanbury, a man of the world, the smart financier, to allow himself to be tricked by a common green goods man! That would do him no good from a business point of view.

No, he would keep the thing dark if possible, until he had settled up with Saville, and if money could do anything, that settlement should not be long delayed.

His musings alternating between schemes of revenge and curious conjectures as to Saville's failure or success at San Francisco, Stanbury set to work to make the best of the situation.

He dismissed the thought of escape almost as soon as it presented itself. With time he might construct a raft or secure a passage in conjunction with a floating log, but even should he reach the shore of the lake safely, he would be in a scarcely better position. With no weapon, only a few days' food—supposing he had been able to convey it across—and in all probability some hundreds of miles of virgin forest between himself and civilization, his predicament would be worse than ever.

Besides he had but a very vague notion of his whereabouts. He had an idea that this must be one of the many lakes west of the Sink of the Humboldt, but he was by no means sure.

No, there was nothing to be done but to take matters philosophically and await the rescue which Saville had promised. Meanwhile there was the tent to pitch and supper to get. This he cooked in due course with the expert hand of an old campaigner. Then, after his meal, he lit his pipe and sat there absorbed in thought.

Soon a mist began to rise, and building up his fire so that it would burn well into the night, Stanbury knocked out his pipe and retired into his tent. Within ten minutes he was rolled in his blanket and sleeping soundly.

Stanbury woke with the dawn, and it was only after he had called drowsily on Saville twice that he remembered what had happened. Then he gave a grim laugh and went outside.

The weary hours dragged on. Fortunately for the captive the weather remained fine and, the month being September, the heat was not excessive. He kept a sharp lookout. It was about the only thing to do, and there was just one chance in a thousand—in ten thousand it might

be—that some wandering fellow-being would come into that region.

In view of the one infinitesimal chance, Stanbury kept his fire burning all day and as far as possible into the night. There was plenty of dry undergrowth.

But no sign of man nor sound of human tongue came in response to his constant signal, and by the third day Stanbury had given up immediate hope and fallen into a mechanical routine of eating, smoking, sleeping and reading, with occasional pacings up and down and baths in the lake.

At the close of this day he took stock of his food and found that two days more at the most would see him at the end of his resources. For the first time Stanbury began to feel a little anxious as to his personal safety.

Supposing that, after all, Carmichael had proved obdurate and Saville had failed! Would he keep his word as to leaving his enemy to perish?

No, somehow Stanbury felt that he would not do that. Yet his plan of despatching relief might have gone awry.

Then Stanbury suddenly recalled Saville's mention of the hundred dollars which he was to pay his rescuer, whoever he was. That would probably insure obedience to Saville's command.

Instinctively Stanbury watched the part of the lake towards which the motor-boat had gone three days previously. It was surely from that quarter that aid would come, if at all.

If at all! God, he was not to be left there to starve! Sooner than that he would try to swim across, though he knew it was, as Saville had said, quite beyond his powers; but at any rate he could go on until exhausted. Anything would be better than the agony of starvation.

Throughout the fourth day, the slowest lingering of them all, Stanbury watched—watched feverishly, scarcely troubling to eat and not setting himself even to boil water.

Evening came. The sun sank behind the distant forest and dusk gathered over the wide waters.

Stanbury, weary of constantly straining eye and ear, collapsed on the ground with a despairing groan.

To Be Continued.

Hello, Somebody!

by

Leslie Davis

CHARD WILLIS flung his arms across the table and his head down on them.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Oh, Lord!"

Through the open window of the boarding-house bedroom, the warm fragrance of a soft June day played teasingly against his cheek. A light laugh floated up from the sidewalk and made him suddenly lean forward to see what was going on there.

A man and a girl had stopped a minute while she pulled the stem of a rose through his buttonhole. It required quite a little adjusting and they both laughed again.

It was such a wonderful day to do things; not bad things nor wild things, but sunshiny, woodsy, fieldy, frolicky, friendly things, the kind one does with a pal or a nice girl.

"Oh, Lord!" Chard groaned again. "Think of a real girl, a laughing, sensible, comfortable, lovable girl with ruffles and slippers and ideas and eyelashes and a sash!"

The picture he conjured flooded him with sick lonesomeness. His brown eyes, intended for twinkling, stared unseeing down the street. His big, generous mouth, fashioned for laughing, had forgotten its purpose and was grimly fixed in a straight line.

Outside, the sunshine and leaves made dancing checker-boards of light and shade.

"I am going out," announced Chard Willis, desperately, "And I am going out with a girl!"

The telephone was down in the empty hall. Chard ran down-stairs and opened the book at random.

"The first name that I see," he decided, "and I won't stop till I get one, but heavens, what kind of a girl will go!"

He looked down at the open page.

"Parker, Miss Angelique. 136 Leavitt's Lane. 1281."

He lifted the receiver.

"1281," he called firmly. There was only a second's pause.

"Yes?" said a feminine voice in his ear.

"May I speak with Miss Angelique Parker?"

"I am Miss Angelique Parker."

"Oh, good afternoon, Miss Parker. I called up to ask if you would go out this afternoon, driving or walking or any way you like."

"Wh—what did you say?" The words came in a startled gasp. "Did somebody ask me to go walking? Who is speaking, please?"

"My name is Chard Willis." He was going to be cheap but he wouldn't be sneaking cheap. "I'm in Mr. Manning's office, the architect, you know. I don't know a soul in town and it's such a wonderful day and I've been alone four months. I've simply got to have *somebody*."

"But how did you hear of me?"

"I chose your name from the telephone-book."

"Oh-h. I see. So I owe this pleasure to the telephone book?"

Chard laughed with quick embarrassment. His burst of confidence was suddenly over.

"Won't you please excuse me, Miss Parker? I might have known better. If you'll only forget it happened—"

"No, no! Oh, please don't ring off! I just had to think a minute. I believe I'd rather like to know you!"

Chard laughed again, in relief this time.

"Good! What will you do? Where can I meet you?"

"I really can't go walking or driving but couldn't you come to see me? It's ever so summery here, all yellow and green. I think you would like it." There was a quaint, whimsical note in her voice that was winning.

"I think I'd like *you!*" cried Chard, impulsively. "You sound—nice!"

"Oh, I'm nice. I'm as nice as I can be. I shouldn't wonder if you went quite crazy about me. People have!"

"I'm frightfully particular," Chard giggled back, "though you might not guess it from my—my methods. I'll have to warn you that I *detest* scant skirts!"

"*Scant skirts!*" scornfully. "Why, *nobody* wears scant skirts any more! Mine is *yards* around!"

"I breathe again! Do you skulk around in heelless shoes?"

"I have on a perfectly *fetching* pair of slippers!"

"You encourage me to touch upon one more point. Do you jamb your fists down in the pockets of your sweater when you stride along?"

"Sweater! I wear a chiffon scarf!"

"Take back the words! They excite me frantically. Don't tell me that I am to see a real girl! You know the kind I means. She wears a white dress with ruffles and when she gets older it's a blue muslin and later, when she is quite old, it turns into a gray silk."

A low laugh came merrily back to him.

"I know the kind exactly, but I won't promise what you'll see. You won't see anything if you don't stop talking and start. You must take a Ramsey Road car and get off at Leavitt's Lane."

"Oh, I say," the boy in him blurted out, "just as we are getting acquainted, will a cruel parent appear and order me out?"

"What's that? A cruel—Oh, no. I'm afraid there won't be any parent." A new note struck his ear.

"Oh, I say," the man in him apologized, "I'm sorry, Miss Parker. I'm afraid I went too far."

"Why, no-o. It's only that if you hadn't had a parent for—for a very long time, almost any kind would seem pretty fine, that's all."

Chard's warm heart went out in quick sympathy. She was an orphan, probably alone in a boarding-house.

"Miss Angelique," he called impulsively, "are you lonesome too?"

"Why, just a little bit, just the least bit in the world. Not that I haven't friends, the best possible kind of friends, but you see Sunday is such a home day. Everybody is so—so—"

"Thundering busy," supplemented Chard.

"Oh, *thundering*," she agreed, promptly.

"I'm coming now!" he cried and seized his hat.

The Ramsey Road car journeyed around the big manufacturing town quite a bit before it skated into Ramsey Road at all, then Chard noticed that the city was quietly turning into the country. The tall, thin houses were growing shorter and broader. They were also moving farther apart and settling themselves down in pretty little lawns and gardens. Baby carriages and hammocks and garden hose began to appear and the piazzas had a noticeably hospitable air.

When he alighted at Leavitt's Lane, Chard swung easily along, studying the numbers as he passed. It was not a very long street and No. 136 proved to be the last house in it. Chard looked with surprise at the rambling, old-fashioned dwelling in a garden enclosed by a white picket fence.

It did not look like a boarding-house and his heart thumped rather nervously as he opened the little gate and walked up the path.

He had hoped the girl would make it easier by coming out to meet him, but no one was in sight. However, the door stood hospitably open and as soon as he stepped on the porch a voice, grown familiar within the hour, called gaily out to him.

"Come right in!" she cried. "Come in and see what you see!"

And what he saw—what his amazed eyes actually saw—was a big comfortable, cushioned wheel-chair holding a pretty little pink faced lady in a gray silk dress.

Fortunately the floor did not open and swallow him, staring eyes, fatuous smile and all, because in a minute, after one swift, searching look that took him all in, Miss Angelique Parker began to laugh so merrily that Chard was suddenly glad he was there after all.

"You began it," she chaffed him, "so you have to take the consequences. And there aren't any false pretenses about me, I'm just as represented."

She flaunted her pretty scarf airily.

"Yes, you are exactly as guaranteed," agreed Chard, pushing up a chair and noting compassionately that the fetching slippers had never been rubbed by any contact with the floor. "And you are so entirely satisfactory that I am going to stay."

"Until quarter past five," she amended. "I have another engagement later. I told you I was popular."

"You told me you were lonesome. Now

you are simply trying to make me jealous. You'd better be careful. I may be fearful when I'm roused."

"That's true. Do forget the unfortunate slip and we'll give all our attention to *you*. I really want to know how you happen to be in town."

So Chard told her about the excellent opening with Mr. Manning and how well the work was going, and Miss Parker was so genuinely interested and so friendly and kind that he went on and told her about his mother and father and Mollie, his sister.

In return, Miss Parker explained that she lived alone with her faithful serving woman, but that with so many friends in town and a telephone right on the table beside her it wasn't a bit lonely, it was really almost a *whirl* at times. And there was always her brother's family to take comfort with.

It seemed her brother was the Parker who ran the bank. This led to business and panics and politics and militarism, the kind of talk they had at the table at home. It gave him the feeling of being back among his own kind once more.

Promptly at five-fifteen, Chard rose.

"It's been perfectly fine, Miss Parker, I'd like you to know—"

He hesitated, helplessly. How could he tell her what she had done for him, how she had mysteriously pulled him into his own world, with its own standards, again; that he'd stick to them now if he *died* of lonesomeness; that he wasn't going to be cheap any more?

But the little gray silk lady looked up into his face, and suddenly he saw that he didn't need to tell her; that she knew it already. Could she have been thinking of just this thing when she took her sporting chance and let him come?

"Miss Parker, I'm ready to bite the dust!"

"Oh, no! It's not nourishing!" She hurried him away from the subject. "Stay to supper with me instead. There's going to be strawberry shortcake."

Gratefully, he caught her light tone.

"Shortcake! I'd almost perish for a piece; but what about your engagement?"

"I'd like you to meet it. It's coming in the gate."

She looked out with such affectionate pride shining in her face that Chard turned quickly to see what caused it. And when he saw, he realized the completeness of his habilitation.

Up the path was coming a young girl, the daintiest possible kind of a girl, in a white dress, all billowy with ruffles and a yellow sash!

"Susie, this is my friend, Chard Willis, who is taking supper with us. Mr. Willis, my niece, Susie Parker."

Susie put a friendly little hand in his. She wasn't a very big person. Chard could look down on her curly, auburn-brown head quite easily.

Her eyes were gray and honest when she raised them to his and her nose bore three adorable little freckles on its abbreviated bridge. Her mouth had merry, up-turning corners. It was wholesome and sweet, and Chard could scarcely take his eyes away from it when she talked.

She talked a good deal. It was evident that she was on delightfully intimate terms with the little lady at the head of the table, and she admitted Chard simply and cordially into her circle.

"I should think, Aunt Angie, that Mr. Willis might like to come to the lawn party Saturday. He'd meet ever so many people. And you wouldn't feel like a stranger long, Mr. Willis, because any one that Aunt Angie introduces—well, you can just *imagine!*"

A wonderful social vista opened out before Chard's eyes.

It seemed as though they had just begun to talk when it struck eight.

"Susie," said Miss Angie, "those yellow roses that your mother is so fond of are in bloom. I would be glad if you would pick them for her. Then Mr. Willis can take you home."

Chard looked wistfully after the white ruffles, going obediently down to the bushes.

"Miss Parker," he whispered, "*I'm* under false pretenses now. I'll have to tell her."

Little Miss Angie sat up very straight. "You'll have to do nothing of the kind!" she retorted. "If that isn't just like a man! They can only see their own side. You will please have a little consideration for me, Mr. Willis! Do you want to ruin me in the eyes of my family? If you tell how we met, they will make me have a chaperon!"

"The roses are beautiful, Aunt Angie!" called Susie from outside. "I've a big bunch for mother. Ready, Mr. Willis?"

Chard gave Miss Parker's hand a grateful squeeze and sped to the call. Together, he and Susie went out into the fragrant June dusk.

"Why, I haven't decorated you! Hold these and I will." She pulled a flower from her bunch and turned to him.

Chard looked reverently down on the brown head. He had a swift recollection of himself, as he had sat a few hours before wistfully watching the couple under his window. Now he himself was being "decorated."

"There, that's better." Susie gave a little nod of satisfaction and they started on, turning out to allow another girl to pass.

She was handsome, this second girl, in a bold, dashing way, though her mouth was wide and too loose-lipped and her eyes were big and too black. Her scarlet hat was overlarge. She gave a half smile of impudent patronage as they met, glancing from the flower in Chard's coat to the ones in Susie's hands.

Chard caught the look and resented it, then realized how easily he might have been walking with this other girl instead of with the rare little maid by his side. They might even have met Susie going home with her roses! The thought made him sick.

"Mother and father aren't home," said Susie when they reached the steps, "but I hope you'll come again and meet them."

"I'd love to. I wonder when—" Chard was torn between doubt and desire. "I suppose to-morrow evening would be too soon?"

"Too soon? To-morrow?" She raised her dear, honest eyes to his. "Why, I shouldn't think to-morrow would be a bit too soon!"

THE BARD

HE hears in bird and wind and sea
The whisper of Calliope,
And what he hears he sets to rime
And sings it to a strain sublime.

He reads romance of rue and rose
In Flora's fair portfolios,
And what he reads, he with his pen
Illumines for the hearts of men.

He gathers balm from dreamland boughs
And binds it on world-weary brows;
He from a lowly wayside weed
Entwines an ode or frames a creed.

Born 'neath the steadfast star of hope
What seer may cast his horoscope,
Or who shall gage what he achieves
Who strives for heaven's laurel leaves?

Clarence Urmy

The Star of Adventure

by Perley Poore Sheehan

A Story of Royalty, War and Love

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

CHANLER KNOWLTON, son of a Creole family living on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, starts out to seek his fortune *via* the great river. On the quay at New Orleans he is enabled to befriend a young fellow of his own age, who turns out to be the Duke of Angoulême, Royalist claimant to the throne of France. Paul Regard, as the latter calls himself, gets Knowlton to go with him as fellow mule-tender on the ship Choctaw, bound for Spain with its cargo of live stock.

Near the Azores a white yacht overhauls them, just before a fleet of French warships takes up the pursuit. The young duke goes on board the yacht with a girl to whom Chanler loses his heart at first sight. The duke, however, first entrusts to the American the diamond star, which is his badge of office. Meantime the Marquis de Warren, from the yacht, takes Paul Regard's name and place on the mule-ship. But when a deputation from the war-ships begins search, Chanler drops overboard with a life-preserver, asking De Warren to sneak a rope over the starboard side when the hunt is over. But no rope appears, the Choctaw moves on, and Chanler is left alone in the night on the surface of the sea.

CHAPTER X.

FRIEND OR ENEMY?

"HE is dead," said the first fisherman.

"No, see how he moves his arm," said the second fisherman.

"That's merely the movement of the water."

"I tell you no, imbecile; he's trying to get a better hold on the net."

"Mother of Heaven! I believe you speak the truth."

The sail of a fishing-sloop loomed up blood-red in the first rays of the lifting sun. The men aboard of her were shaggy and bearded. Some wore gaily-colored handkerchiefs knotted about their heads, others knitted caps.

Most of them wore one earring or two, as aids to the eyesight, also as charms against bad luck in general. Their clothing was limited, for the most part, to ragged shirts and trousers. They were tugging at a red-brown net that came inboard unwillingly. The open hold of the sloop was already half-filled with fish.

The captain of the sloop, but little better dressed than the members of his crew, had likewise looked with concentrated interest at the eerie burden in the net. He suddenly turned and shouted an order to one of his men busy about an open fire on the bit of deck that braced the mast amidships.

The man at the fire hastily spilled some hot water from a boiling pot into a tin pan, added a handful of brown sugar and a dash of rum.

He came skipping forward with his pan just as the man in the net came inboard.

He had a life-preserver about him, but life itself was so nearly gone that there was reason for debate as to whether he was altogether dead or not. There was a jabber of a language more like Portuguese than anything else—the dialect of the Azores.

The tin pan was applied to the blue lips of the man from the sea. The liquid, hot with both fire and alcohol, filled his mouth and throat. The hesitating heart was stimulated to take up its task again.

"I've still got it," said the man.

"An Englishman," cried the members of the crew.

"Or an American," added the captain. He leaned closer. He himself spoke English. "Hello, Bill," he said. "All right?"

"Yes, so long's I've got—the star."

The stranger from the sea was making a feeble effort to paw into his shirt, but his movements were hampered by the life-belt. With the belt still on him, they carried him back along the bulwarks to the tiny deck. There, they poured more rum and hot water into him as they began to strip him of the life-preserver and his clothing.

Suddenly, the man who had been on the brink of death came to life. He had opened his eyes, clutching at the leather pouch that dangled from his neck by a sodden thong.

"You don't get it," he gasped.

The captain of the sloop knelt beside him.

"We won't rob you," he said. "We're good. Who are you?"

"Chanler Knowlton, of Bayou Lafarge, America."

"I know America. I've been there. My boy, he's in America. Many, many Azores children go to America. Good schools there. Portugal schools no good."

"Am I safe?"

"Yes."

"How far am I from France?"

The friendly captain made a gesture that might have embraced the width of the hemisphere.

From somewhere about the sloop they had brought a ragged square of sail-cloth. It was as large as a blanket. They rubbed Knowlton down with this and wrapped him up in it. They gave him more punch. They fed him with a thick and creamy gruel of fresh fish.

And, all the time, the man who had a boy in America sat at Knowlton's side and looked at him with friendly eyes until finally the young fellow slept.

As his sleep got sounder the captain of the sloop put out his hand to the leather case. He deftly lifted it. He cast a look about him to make sure that he was not being spied upon by the members of his crew.

He felt the weight of the thing in his hand. It was only gold that was as heavy as that, and he speculated for a moment or two over that first gesture of the American to defend this thing, whatever it was.

Once more his dark eyes came back reflectively to the face of the man who slept. He shook his head. He put the leather case back. He drew it toward him again.

There was no telling how this personal debate with his conscience might have ended, but before the captain of the sloop could decide it for himself there came a sharp cry from one of the men working at the nets. It was a cry immediately repeated.

Through the morning haze from the southeast there came a dim, swift shape like a great fish swimming on the surface of the water.

"A torpedo boat, Portuguese," said the captain, looking up.

He followed the comment by a hasty command to the members of his crew. Without changing his position, he reached over and covered the sleeping American's face with a corner of the sail-cloth.

The torpedo boat came up. An officer, from her little bridge, hailed the fishermen through a megaphone.

"Friends, have you seen anything of a man overboard hereabouts?"

"A strange question, *caballero!*" the captain bellowed.

He turned to the cook back of him.

"If our friend here wakes," he whispered, "you will choke him, but not to kill. It is for his own good. Do it as if you were packing fish."

He again raised his voice to the captain of the torpedo boat.

"A thousand regrets, but that we have not!" he shouted; "nor have my men seen any one!"

" Should you find him," came the answer, "dead or alive, keep him in safety—especially that which you find upon him—until you can hear from me or until you can get word to me—you see the number?—at Fayal."

"Yes, your highness."

"A big reward—for discretion."

"But what sort of a man?"

"You will know him by a gold decoration which he carries in a leather case."

"The saints be good to both of us," the captain of the sloop bellowed. "How large did you say was the reward?"

"A thousand milreis!"

There was a suppressed cheer from the members of the sloop crew. Their captain raised his palm in salute as the torpedo boat rocked into speed again.

"Name of a red devil!" he exclaimed. "We fish a fellow out of the water. Along comes a *senhor* lieutenant on a torpedo boat to buy him off of us. A bargain today is never as good as it might be tomorrow. If the lieutenant offers us a thousand dollars for our friend there is somebody who will offer two."

There was no more fishing, scarcely any pretense at it. Off in the dim distance they could see the torpedo boat tacking about across the expanse of water like a sailboat with an amateur at the helm.

"He asked how far he was from the coast of France," said one. "Captain, could we take so long a cruise as that?"

"We could go to America itself."

"Suppose we look into the leather case."

"It might bring bad luck."

"It brought good luck to him all right. God only knows how long he was adrift."

" 'Dead or alive,' that is what the lieutenant said; and the reward is for the thing in the leather case."

"I tell you that we'll not kill what the good God has spared," said the captain, sitting in final judgment on the general debate. "We'll wait until he has had his sleep. We'll hear what he has to say."

It was in the middle of the afternoon before Knowlton opened his eyes again. The treatment he had received was as good perhaps as he could have got in the finest hospital in the world, and throughout the morning and the early afternoon the sun had been flooding down its vital warmth upon him.

He awoke, still wrapped in his sailcloth. He was streaming with perspiration. But, apart from a certain lassitude, he was feeling as fit as he had ever felt in his life.

But how did it come that he was wrapped up like this?—that there was a red sail flapping above his head?

There came a swift pang of recollection. Once more his hand sought the thong about his neck, the precious case suspended from it. Still there! He was alive and still in possession of the thing that had been entrusted to him.

There must have been a dozen men looking at him. They were as savage a lot as he had ever seen. He could not remember having seen any of them before. He could remember no detail of how he had come aboard. Then one of the men, slightly better dressed, slightly less shaggy than his fellows, was addressing him in English.

"You see, we are good people. We do not rob you."

"You have my gratitude," said Knowlton. "Who are you, and where am I?"

"I am Captain Dias, and this is my fishing-boat, the Pedro. All of us are poor fishermen. This morning, before dawn, we came out here from Fayal, which you will see a little later when the mist goes up. We put our net overboard. It floated. When we drew it in, there you were. And all this is God's truth."

As simple as had been the statement of

the man, it served to bring back to Knowlton full recollection of everything that had taken place. Even those last, faint whispers of delirium returned to him. He saw again the limitless night, felt himself adrift and deserted in the open ocean.

"God's truth and God's will," he said. "Captain Dias, how far are we from the coast of France?"

CHAPTER XI.

IN FRANCE.

"THE report of Lieutenant Barros of Fayal," cried the young Duke of Angoulême.

He tore the envelope open with feverish haste and glanced down the enclosure.

His face fell.

"What word, sire?"

"A shade better than the worst, my grandfather," said the young duke.

The old gentleman with the white beard—he who had come to take the duke from the Choctaw—let his face rest for a moment on his hand.

He was the picture of an old philosopher sitting there. But there was nothing severely intellectual in his surroundings. The room itself was enormous, richly furnished in the style of Louis XIV. Along one side of it were a row of windows, high and broad, opening on the famous formal gardens of the Château Lenoir. They were gardens which were already famous before Versailles was built.

The Duke of Angoulême himself sat at a table where the "Sun King" had once made semblance at work.

The secretary who had brought the missive had tarried for a moment, then, at a sign, had withdrawn again. The young duke still sat in an attitude of dejection when he heard the rustle of a dress, a light footstep.

He looked up with the shadow of a smile to greet the girl who had accompanied his grandfather on the yacht.

"Good morning, Blanche," he said.

He inclined his cheek. She kissed him as a sister might have done. He carelessly caught one of her hands, touched it with his lips.

"Shall I never be able to teach your majesty, and you, Mlle. de Vallières, the proper salutations?"

There was a note of genuine asperity in the old gentleman's voice. He reared himself to his great height, bowed with the grace of a courtier.

"Sire," he said, with only a touch of irony in his voice, "*mademoiselle la princesse Blanche de Vallières* craves the honor of saluting his majesty, her cousin, and desires to know if his majesty has had a favorable night."

"Tut! tut! grandfather," cried the duke. "I don't call you '*Monsieur le comte*' every time I speak to you, nor '*Monsieur du Barry*.' And half the time you yourself are forgetting to dub me 'majesty' or 'sire' and calling me just plain Jean, instead. And this is all the relaxation I get—with you and Blanche—what with all the bishops and senators and Academicians coming here. That's why I wanted this American to be my secretary. Didn't that other American, Franklin, add luster to the proudest of courts? Was Lafayette any the less a marquis of the old order for having been a brother to Washington?"

"My son," said the Count du Barry, with a shade of heat, "you are too apt to forget that you are already the King of France, the emperor of her colonies, and that by the grace of God!"

"Pardon, my grandfather!"

"Don't ask my pardon," said the Count du Barry; "give it!"

Mlle. de Vallières saved the situation in her own way. She threw her arms about the old man's neck, drew him down and kissed his forehead.

"Let me light your cigarette for you," she pleaded.

She did so, and left the old count mollified. Then she turned to Jean of Angoulême.

"What about—about our American?" she asked.

"Here is the report I have just received from Lieutenant Barros, a good friend of ours. Since the last republican revolution in Portugal he has been reduced to the command of a torpedo boat stationed at Fayal. He writes that on the morning following the disappearance of M. Knowlton from the Choctaw he personally searched all the waters thereabouts and found no trace of him. He even engaged the service of numerous fishermen, in the hope of recovering—the star. The quest has remained unsuccessful."

"That was ten days ago," said the Princess Blanche. "And nothing further from Santander?"

"Nothing since the escape of the Marquis de Warren."

"He has spoken to me about it," said the princess, with the barest suspicion of rising color, of quickening breath. "Ah, if he could have done something more than what he did! He says that he saw M. Knowlton go into the water; that, later on, he lowered the rope, as it had been agreed. He hailed and hailed. But M. Knowlton gave no sign of himself, was never seen again. Ah, couldn't he have stopped the ship?—lowered a boat?"

"He says that, at the time, he was sure that M. Knowlton had returned to the ship by his own means and was safely hidden."

The Count du Barry reflectively adjusted his cigarette in its amber holder. The Princess Blanche de Vallières had given him a glance and had hastened again into speech, as if to forestall the thing that she knew he was about to say.

"Have you learned yet why it was the Reine Blanche was permitted to escape after they had practically caught us?"

"The outlook becomes blacker. It was because the poltroon government in Paris suddenly received a hint that before very long it will have to fight some one else than French patriots."

"Not war!"

"Who knows? God forbid! God forbid, that is, until there is a government at Paris strong enough to face peril and challenge it with a soul above politics and money!"

"And our people?"

Again the old Count du Barry made a movement as if to interrupt the conversation. But Mlle. de Vallières displayed an increased eagerness to have her questions answered by her cousin Jean.

"And our people?" she repeated.

"Faithful, as they always have been. The Nationalists are preparing their proclamations. All the Royalist groups are ready to renounce the Government of the Third Republic and swear allegiance to the House of Valois. We have two admirals of the fleet, three commanders of army corps, fourteen generals. At least two members of the Council of Ministers are ready to turn over their portfolios. The Church and the Army—they are France—the soul and the good right arm —they are with us—for king and country, for the glory which is France!"

"But if there should be a foreign war?"

"That is why we are in such a hurry. We are patriots. There is no man in the Royalist cause who does not put France ahead of commerce. *Seigneur!* When I think of all the politicians, the bankers, the merchants, the traffickers in the blood of the nation in this the hour of her peril, it makes me sick. Should the Germans fall upon us now it would be as it was in seventy."

"These things, sire, were better discussed in council," said the Count du Barry.

"Please, please, dear grandfather," Mlle. de Vallières begged. "Oh, if I were not only a woman how I should love to do something—to fight—to die!"

"You'll have a chance to do your share, my darling Blanche," said Jean of Angoulême.

"It was precisely that which I wished to mention to your majesty," said the old Count du Barry, with final decision. "I suppose that I might as well mention it while our Blanche is here. I had a conversation with the Marquis de Warren last evening. Of course there is no need of

my referring to the fact that he is exceedingly important to our cause.

"His uncle is the commander of the garrison at Tullemont. His brother-in-law holds the Soudan in the hollow of his hand. At least four senators, three Academicians, two deputies, one cardinal, are connections of his. Your majesty knows as well as I do that his private fortune is colossal. What he did aboard that miserable mule-ship was sufficient proof that, personally, he is devoted to us."

"What does the marquis want?"

"This, your majesty. He solicits the hand of our cousin, Mlle. de Vallières, in marriage."

"I expected as much," said Jean.

There was something in his tone that gave encouragement to Mlle de Vallières herself. She had heard the announcement with a slight tensing of her slender form, an added luster in her dark eyes, a lowering of her straight eyebrows.

"But I do not love him," she said. "I never have loved him. I never shall."

The young Duke of Angoulême leaned back in his chair. He was looking up at his cousin with a smile in which there was both sympathy and pain.

"I shall withhold permission," he whispered.

"I'll make bold to warn both of you, my children—I beg pardon—your majesty and likewise *mademoiselle la princesse*—that we are rapidly approaching that moment when personal desires and motives will have to be put aside, finally and absolutely. When a throne and a nation are to be saved, by the grace of God, it is infamy for one to give even a thought to self."

Mlle. de Vallières dropped into a chair. She looked as if she would like to cry. But she held her head high. There was a determined set to her pink lips.

Jean of Angoulême was listening to his uncle with his eyes on the table in front of him. For the moment he had nothing to say.

"A moment ago, my dear little Blanche," went on M. du Barry, in a softer voice, "you were talking about your desire to make some great sacrifice—even of life itself—for the cause, for France. This is it. Remember your devoted ancestors. The ladies of our line have done as much since the first Capet came to the throne."

"I don't love him," the Princess Blanche whispered, unable to think of any other answer.

"And there is the forthcoming marriage of his majesty's self," went on the Count du Barry. "See how nobly he has ceded what might have been his personal wishes. Princess Adrienne is on her way now from Austria—"

"They say she's a fright," remarked Jean.

"Through her marriage with his majesty we shall thus unite Valois, Bourbon and Orleans. Did his majesty object because he had never seen her, because she was a trifle of ten years older than he was, because she had no great reputation for beauty—"

"My heart objected, all right," said the heir to the throne.

"Jean," cried the Princess Blanche, softly, "do you want to see me married to M. de Warren?"

She might have said more. But suddenly she lifted her head and turned to look out across the gardens. Both Jean of Angoulême and the Count du Barry, in spite of their preoccupation, had done likewise.

Through the open windows there came a mounting chorus of discordant sound—a barking of hounds, a murmuring surf of human speech.

Mlle. de Vallières had risen from her chair. She clapped a hand to her heart. Her eyes, her whole face, her very figure, took on the vivid aspect of wonder and expectation.

At the other extremity of the gardens, through a vista of marble colonnades, clipped shrubbery, formal parterres and broad walks, there appeared what might have been a band of gipsies—a dozen

men, ill and strangely clad in bright colors. They were still too far off to be recognized by ordinary sight. But Mlle. de Vallières had identified at least one of them.

"It's the American," she panted. "It's M. Knowlton!"

CHAPTER XII.

SENSING THE ENEMY.

"I DIDN'T want to make such a sensational entry," said Knowlton, as the Duke of Angoulême warmly greeted him. "I just wanted to get here—to give you this."

Even in that first strenuous moment, when emotions were running high, he had put his hand to his breast and was removing the leather thong to which hung suspended the emblem of the House of Valois.

"Chan! Chan!" cried the Duke of Angoulême. "We had almost given you up for lost. At least others had. I hadn't. I refused to listen to the counsels of my brain. It was my heart that I listened to, and my heart told me that you would appear again. Now you are here."

They had met in the center of the garden. The duke was bareheaded. He had come running the moment his cousin had pronounced the name of the missing man.

Chan turned to those who had followed him.

"Captain Dias," he said, "tell your men that this is the prince I spoke about. This is the place you brought me so far to find."

But the fishermen needed no word from their captain to assure them that the promise that had brought them from the Azores was something more than a dream.

They came from a race who had always sought the fulfilment of dreams beyond the sea. Brothers, fathers, and children even, had sent messages back to them from distant America, from lands remoter still, telling of newly discovered wonders.

They stood there in their picturesque rags, taking this realization of their own dream largely as a matter of course. Their dark eyes flashed. Their earrings sparkled in the morning sunshine.

Chan introduced the captain to the duke, and the two shook hands. The captain spoke in English.

"Maybe we fight for you, some day."

The duke caught his breath.

"Not for me," he said softly; "but for France."

"Yes."

There had been a number of gamekeepers and gardeners lingering about. An old lodge-keeper had pursued the visitors from the gates of the park. When these people saw how the master of the Château Lenoir greeted the ragged band they were more or less overwhelmed. Jean gave them a command of smiling authority that sent them scurrying away in their several directions.

And now the girl of the yacht appeared. Knowlton saw her from afar. She had run a little way. She had paused, and even lingered while she made a pretense at studying a rose. Then she had approached with an air of dignity for a certain interval. She had hurried again.

At last, she was there—breathless, as fresh and blooming and as fragrant as if she herself were a rose.

And all those fishermen—there were a round dozen of them—who had not been in the least affected by the sight of a park that had made Louis XIV jealous were almost as greatly touched by this vision of beauty as Knowlton himself had been.

Jean of Angoulême noticed the subtle change that had come over the group. He turned.

"Blanche," he cried, "come here. It's strange," he added, turning to Chan, "but she recognized you while you were still a quarter of a mile away."

"M. Knowlton," Mlle. de Vallières faltered, "we are all enchanted to see you in safety."

"*Mademoiselle,*" said Chan simply.

Had he obeyed the dictates of his heart, he would have gone to one knee as gallantly as any knight and told her that she was the Star of Valois who had brought him to safety. Perhaps his eyes were expressing this while his tongue failed him. He had inherited his mother's eyes—dark, lively, responsive.

It is possible that there was likewise a message in the eyes of the Princess Blanche herself. She felt a moment of swoon. With a little gasp, she turned from Chan to the fishermen who had followed him.

She smiled on Captain Dias. The captain was a slave of impulse in more ways than one. He boldly dropped, not to one knee but to both. The others followed suit.

To a man, they believed in fairies and sirens. Perhaps they believed that she was one.

Count du Barry came down the path from the château with dignified speed. If he had been greatly put out by this interruption in affairs of state he gave no sign of it. He shook Knowlton warmly by the hand.

Not in Jean's attitude, nor in that of the Princess Blanche, nor in that of the Count du Barry had there been any reminder to Chan that as the fishermen looked so he also must have appeared.

His clothing, none too good in the first place, was shrunken and stained by his long sojourn in the sea. His shoes were all but gone. He had no hat. It was a knitted cap he wore when he had appeared at the gates of the park, and this he now carried in his hand.

As for his hair, it was long and unkempt. On cheek and chin there was the shadow of a nascent beard.

"When did you get in?" Jean asked, quite as if Knowlton had arrived by train or automobile.

The whole party, including the fishermen, for whom the princess had become a patron saint, had started forward in the direction of the château.

"We got in last night, or rather, early this morning," answered Chan. "We had been stopped and interviewed so often by warships of one kind or another—British, Spanish, French—that I knew what would be in store for us if we attempted to make a landing in the day time. So we stood off until it was black night.

"We made the shore like so many smugglers. The ship that brought us is, I fear, by this time either a complete wreck or in the hands of the authorities. The papers of Nantes this afternoon will have strange speculations as to the ownership and origin of the fishing-sloop Pedro."

"They deserted the ship, then?"

"All for the cause. They are followers of the star. I had no money. They had raked me out of the sea in their net. All that I had was the thing you had given me and—what I had in my heart, my friend. The coin of daring! You paid your way around the world with it. I bought a ship with it, came from the Azores to the coast of France. But," Chan added with a laugh, "that doesn't mean that these friends of mine have been paid. They have followed me here."

"We'll ask them what they expect; then we'll give them twice as much. So should every one be paid who acts on faith—and generally is."

"I was worried about your own fate, Jean—and those who were with you."

"The chase of the Reine Blanche ended when I ordered the Reine Blanche stopped. Our pursuers had fired a solid shot. We had, as you know, a lady aboard. Then, when they were signaling us to expect a boat, lo, a wireless reached them to make for Brest and lose no time. I know, because the wireless on the Reine Blanche got the message, too, and we have the code. Do you remember that intuition I had about the imminence of war?"

"Yes; and the answer is?"

"It's more imminent than ever. We have certain friends in Berlin, in Vienna. The solution is on the knees of the gods."

"*Tiens!* Isn't that the Marquis de Warren, up there on the terrace?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad that he is safe," said Knowlton. "You know, he was to have got a rope to me from the Choctaw. I knew that when he failed to do so, and the old Choctaw churned away, left me to myself out there all alone in the ocean—I knew that he himself also must be in serious trouble of some sort."

The Duke of Angoulême made no reply. The American shot him a quick glance. He saw that a change had come into his friend's face.

"What's the matter, Jean?"

"The Marquis de Warren told me about that part of the adventure," was the reply. "There seems to have been some sort of a misunderstanding."

They had come to the foot of the first flight of steps leading to the series of terraces.

Knowlton glanced up. He saw that the Marquis de Warren had seen and recognized him. On de Warren's face was a look that gave Chan his first almost indefinable feeling of enmity.

Some instinct bade him to turn and look back of him. There was the Princess Blanche. She was followed by her band of fishermen, a fairy princess, indeed, straight out of a fairy tale.

She smiled at him. This time he knew that his own eyes must have sent back to her something of what filled his heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

"LONG LIVE THE KING!"

THE Duke of Angoulême led his American friend up a broad flight of stairs. They had avoided the guests on the terrace. The fishermen had been sent around to the kitchens for entertainment.

"When my honored grandfather learned that I was homeward bound," said the duke, "he laid in enough of everything to clothe twenty men from head to foot. Also be it known that I have one of the best barbers in France. I'll send him along with the clothing you're to select from as a makeshift until the tailors and shirtmakers can fit you out on your own commands. Keep Salvatore—he's the barber—by you in case there should be something missing. You'll find him invaluable. Would you like a couple of valets to help you dress?"

"They'd embarrass me," replied Chan.

They reached a suite of living rooms which commanded a view of more terraces and the outlying park.

"Your quarters—your home," said the duke, waving his hand. "I'll send you rolls and coffee here. There's a clock. We'll have luncheon at eleven—just you and I, my grandfather and my cousin Blanche."

He paused, then added, with a smile: "If you want your friend the king, just tell Salvatore, and the king will come."

Chan found that the Count du Barry was a man of excellent taste, so far as clothing was concerned. Not only that, but there had evidently existed in the old gentleman's mind some doubt as to the sizes that his grandson would require.

There was a large range of dimensions—shoes, shirts, everything. By the time that the devoted and passionately interested little Salvatore had finished with him Chan might have passed as a recent arrival from the Boulevards.

The Duke of Angoulême expressed his approval of his friend's changed appearance with a joyful shout. Throughout the long luncheon that followed Chan was aware more than once that the old Count du Barry likewise approved his transformation.

But in spite of his efforts to think of other things, Knowlton was asking himself what the Princess Blanche might think.

It made him frightfully self-conscious at times. The color kept coming and going from his freshly shaven cheeks as if he were a débutante.

"She's laughing at me."

And that was the only thing that he was sure of.

Vaguely he heard that there was going

to be some sort of a banquet that night at which the leaders of the dawning revolution would swear allegiance to this new hope of French sovereignty.

"And I shall tell them," said the duke, "that my secretary has arrived, that I have tested him, that he has saved my life, saved the Star of Valois."

Knowlton cast a somewhat desperate glance at Mlle. de Vallières. Those dark lashes of hers fell swiftly over her eyes. There was the suspicion of a smile lingering on her lips.

So she had still been laughing at him! He glanced at the Count du Barry, but the count looked merely grave.

The decisions of men are often as delicately balanced as a chemist's scales; more delicately, even, for what scales are responsive to so light a thing as the downward glance of a girl? So the thought was resolving itself in Knowlton's mind.

He had reflected a lot during that slow, strange voyage he had made up from the Azores to the mouth of the Loire. He had come to the ultimate, unshakable determination to have nothing to do with a revolution against republican France.

Even while he was bathing himself upstairs, and then while Salvatore was cutting his hair and shaving him, he had repeated the determination in the words he was to use when he revealed his decision to Jean.

Now, as his eyes came back to the girl's delicate face, as he saw the color and the texture of it, and as he had some glimpse of the nature back of it, he found that he had no words at all, that that carefully meditated determination of his was disappearing like a breath on a window-pane.

So much for the proposals of man when Fate steps in!

From far and wide, that night, the purring motors brought their masters to the Château Lenoir. Nantes, the nearest railway station, was not far away, but few of the visitors came by train. The gathering was no affair to be publicly advertised.

There were to be sixty guests at the banquet to which the Duke of Angoulême had referred—the leaders of the Royalist and Nationalist parties from all over France. The Church and the Army, the Academies and the University, all were represented.

The duke had invited Chan to be of the number, but he had declined. There was going to be plenty of time, later on, for him to get acquainted with the leaders of the movement.

There may have been a thousand retainers connected with the château and its farms, woods, meadows, and game-preserves; its gardens and hot-houses, stables and kennels, its garages and work-shops. These retainers, on such a night as this, constituted an army of sentinels. Most of them had been born on the place, or had come to it from other great families devoted to the House of Valois.

They were needed. The agents of the Political Branch of the Third Republic's Secret Service were ever on the alert.

In spite of the unusual assemblage there brooded over the old château an atmosphere of becalmed mystery. So it seemed to Chan.

During most of the afternoon he slept. The luxury of such a sleep he had not known since leaving his home in America. Word had been brought him from Jean, the Duke of Angoulême, to make himself at home. He had dined alone. He wrote letters. He read. The night deepened. But all the time his thoughts, in spite of himself, kept reverting to the Princess Blanche.

Finally he made his way down-stairs and out into the garden back of the château—a garden he had seen from the breakfast-room.

The place was even more attractive now than it had been when the sun was shining. There was no moon, but the night was clear, and the stars filled the air with a blue radiance.

Chan hadn't gone very far before he saw two figures seated on a marble bench at the end of one of the paths—two

women. His heart leaped with a premonition. It was Mlle. de Vallières and an elderly companion—the Countess de Saint-Hilaire.

The countess was one of those ladies usually referred to as "a dear old soul"—plump, sixty, as girlish as might be, with more than a trace of her early beauty and a sort of afterglow of romance about her.

She greeted Chan with a complacency almost disconcerting, a suggestion in it that youth would be served and that she was perfectly aware that this meeting of the American and the Princess Blanche was a cut and dried affair. Otherwise, the interchange of courtesies was as commonplace as the meeting of three friends in a village street.

Yet Chan's heart had not ceased its exciting pounding. It seemed impossible that the princess and the elderly countess should be unaware of it. Perhaps they were not unaware of it.

The garden lay about them nebulous in the blue starlight. It was fragrant with its masses of sleeping flowers—lilacs and roses, acacia and wild-grape. The Château Lenoir, dark for the most part, so far as its outward appearance was concerned, had become a stronghold of all the things that French history has ever stood for—intrigue and tragedy, self-sacrifice and visions.

"Let us walk," said the princess softly.

Chan gallantly assisted the Countess de Saint-Hilaire to her feet. The countess accepted his aid gracefully.

"Alas," she said, "my career is finished."

She smiled. Chan wondered what sort of a career she meant. Here in the starlight he had a picture of what she might have looked like thirty or forty years ago—very fair, very romantic, very ready to become a victim to some marriage of convenience; faithful; gradually exchanging the expected consolation of earthly love for the more certain consolation of her churchly devotions.

Chan ventured to express something of his thought.

"If it be permitted me to say so," he declared, "I think that you are still as beautiful as any one could be."

He was doubly rewarded. The countess laughed softly as she took his arm. On his other arm he felt a reassuring pressure from the hand that the Princess Blanche had placed there.

Up the path they passed until they were on a terrace under the shadow of the château. The high windows near them were closed and heavily curtained, but there came to them a suggestion of movement and activity within.

"Why," whispered Mlle. de Vallières, "did you so suddenly decide to-day to become our cousin's secretary?"

Ever since Chan could remember it had been a trick of his tongue and his brain to speak the truth, spontaneously, without premeditation, often when it would have been better, perhaps, to have shaded the truth just a trifle, or, at least, to have maintained silence.

Before he could stop now to think, his tongue and his brain were up to their old trick again. His answer frightened him.

"It was because," he whispered, "—it was because of the look I saw in your eyes."

From the curtained windows there came a greater gust of sound. It was a subdued cheer:

"Vive le Roi!"

"Long live the king!"

And he had dared to say what he had just said to the cousin of the king they were acclaiming in there.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE HOPE OF FRANCE."

THE Princess Blanche gave Chan a glance of veiled fire.

"Let us go in," she said. "I know of a secret passage from which we can look down into the banquet-room. Jean won't mind." She corrected herself as by an afterthought. "His majesty won't mind."

Her dark eyes met Chan's again. This

time she smiled. But it was a frightened, haunted sort of smile that he was never to forget. And yet he didn't smile back. The moment was too solemn.

The Countess de Saint-Hilaire—dear old soul!—was for leaving them; but Mlle. de Vallières would not hear of it. Impulsively she kissed the countess and gave her a filial embrace.

Inside the château they passed along the oak-paneled gallery with the panoplies and the battle-flags—the flags of Angoulême and Valois, of Orléans and Bourbon. There was something fantastic and stirring about it all, for this night there was no steady and prosaic glow of electric light. Ancient custom was again triumphant.

Once more the hall was lighted as it would have been in the time of former kings—by a thousand flickering tapers, each taper blessed for the good of the cause.

There were servants in livery everywhere, as immobile as statues for the most part. A shriveled man in black, whom Chan had not previously seen, was apparently in charge of the château. He had advanced from the depths of the corridor, crooked but nimble, white, old, radiating energy, piercing of eye.

"My grandfather's chamberlain, M. de Briec," whispered Mlle. de Vallières.

He heard her wishes and conducted them to a small cabinet off one end of the hall and saw that they were supplied with a lighted candelabrum. He drew aside a tapestry. A door appeared where there had been no door visible before. Then he bade them good evening.

Chan, carrying the branched candlestick, followed the ladies up the easy ascent of an ancient flight of stairs built into a medieval wall. Like many of the historic châteaux of France the Château Lenoir was an architectural growth of the centuries. The beginnings of it went back to the fourteenth.

From this dim period may have dated the stairway which they were now mounting—solid stone, worn concave by the feet of men and women who had lived and loved and died before America was dreamed of.

The steps wound leisurely around a column polished by vanished hands, and they found themselves in an upper corridor along one side of which were pointed arches. Sounds that had been vague before now became distinct.

The corridor was a concealed gallery along the upper part of the banqueting-room in which the conspirators were gathered.

Chan held his breath. He had placed the candelabrum on the stone floor in response to a whispered command from Mlle. de Vallières. Then he, she and the old Countess de Saint-Hilaire sought one of the pointed arches further on.

The arch, curtained by a tapestry little thicker than a cobweb, must have been invisible to the banqueters, but the room below was visible enough to the onlookers.

There was a long table covered with silver and crystal. At the head of this Chan saw his friend seated in a Gothic chair.

Almost every one else there was old; but Chan felt the fingers of his hand twitching themselves into a fist as he picked out the face of another young man —dark, handsome, sinister—the face of the Marquis de Warren.

Was Mlle. de Vallières also looking at the marquis? Chan risked a glance at her.

Not for the first time, but more forcibly than ever, he was assailed by the dilemma that confronted him. With her cousin on the throne of France she would be inevitably lost to him. Yet he had pledged his aid, such as it was, to bring that event about. He had been trusted. He couldn't draw back.

Yet, written into the plans of this campaign, was the agreement to make her the bride—such things had always been—of some one of equal birth.

There was a deepening silence in the chamber below. Then there rose the deep, measured tones of a voice Chan recognized as that of the Count du Barry.

There was much that Chan could not understand in what the fine old gentleman was saying. But there were those ever-recurring phrases, *"Sa majesté"* and *"l'espoir de la France!"*

Even to Chan the expressions were moving. How much so they must be to those men assembled below he could well imagine. They were phrases which, throughout all French history, had been stained purple to the core.

"His majesty!"

"The hope of France!"

But here, at his side, was such a creature as had ever been the hope of the world. She was the eternal woman. He was the eternal man. What else could matter?

The slow French of the old Count du Barry became more understandable.

"Duty, my friends! For duty is greater than love. For duty is forgetful of self. For duty, austere, unflattering, is the bitter elixir of strength and greater knowledge."

The words might have been addressed to Chan himself.

He was still looking at the Princess Blanche. He saw her taper fingers relax and let fall the handkerchief she carried. She had noticed her loss. Chan stooped and picked it up.

He hesitated. He would have treasured this thing almost like a holy relic. For a moment he was pressing it to his heart.

Duty!—the hope of France!

"*Mademoiselle*," he whispered; and he slipped the handkerchief back into the fingers that had let it fall.

He had decided that the incident should end right then and there. But he had counted neither on the immediate circumstances nor on the explosive power of the greatest passion in the world.

His fingers had come in contact with hers. She had not drawn her hand away. A sort of vertigo swept over them both. They were powerless.

"Blanche!"

It was the mere breath of a whisper.

"Chan!"

"I love you."

"You saw the look in my eyes."

They said no more than that. The old Countess de Saint-Hilaire was leaning forward, absorbed in what was going on in the chamber below. For the time being it was as if this American from Bayou Lafarge and this princess, whose cousin was just then being proclaimed king of France, were alone. There was only the flickering candlelight about them.

Her face was lifted to his. She had pressed his hands to her breast. It was a moment of tumult—of such feeling as might have been expressed in terms of music, perhaps, but in no words that have ever been invented.

His lips touched her eyes and hair. He felt her breath on his face.

The Countess de Saint-Hilaire bestirred herself with an audible sigh.

And up from the banqueting-room there again rose the fateful cry "Long live the king!"

CHAPTER XV.

"BY RIGHT DIVINE."

PARIS was herself again. She had never been gayer. Her life had never been more intense.

There had been a tremendous scandal involving a Minister of Finance—a scandal with equal component parts of gold, politics and love. While this was still at its height there had come that current of still greater interest out of the east—the old, old thrill of War.

The boulevard cafés were crowded until the closing hour of 2 A.M. After that the all-night cafés and restaurants took up the chant of gaiety and excitement. The city was overflowing with tourists—American, English, Russian, German.

They all had money to spend and were spending it as never before. The arts and wiles of luxury had never been so great since the closing days of the Second Empire.

And now, once more, had come that

culminating luxury of the greatest excitement known to man.

"War!"

The newsboys shrilled it as they ran screaming from the Rue Montmartre. There were patriotic allusions to *"La Patrie"* in all the cabarets and music-halls. It had become the one thing talked about.

The Bourse jumped and fell spasmodically. And still, everything was in doubt. It was the very element of doubt which tuned the excitement to concert pitch. Life itself had grown to be a glittering, hypnotic gamble.

If Paris had become a vortex, the center of that vortex had been shifting steadily, unperceived by all but the few, to the Faubourg St. Germain; and, within the faubourg itself to the great town-house of the Count du Barry.

While the agents of the Third Republic were straining every resource of knowledge and cunning to find out just what was going on in the rival capitals of Europe, the Hôtel du Barry listened like a thing alive, secretive, brooding, ready, when the right moment came, to spring into action.

For the old house possessed channels of information which even the government lacked. There was not a court in Europe where some devoted follower of the Royalist cause did not possess opportunities to observe and overhear.

Moreover, not a report came into the French Foreign Office that did not reach the Hôtel du Barry as well before the ink was dry.

Knowlton felt the thrill of it all as the cab that had brought him from the Gare St. Lazare stopped in front of the *porte-cochère* of the mansion that had become his new home since leaving the Château Lenoir.

He was just back from a flying visit to London. In London there had been excitement, too, but nothing like the electric atmosphere of Paris.

He paid the cabman and touched the bell. Before he withdrew his hand the door had been swung open by a porter in the semi-livery of a *concierge*.

At sight of Knowlton, the man doffed the tasseled silk cap he wore, bowed low and saluted him with the respectful familiarity usual to his kind.

"Is his majesty at home?" Chan asked softly, as soon as the door was closed.

"Oui, monsieur."

There was a driveway, high-arched, which led back into the court-yard of the Hôtel du Barry. At one side of this was a broad and lofty door giving access to the grand stairway which led to the upper floors of the house.

Two flunkeys, gorgeously liveried in pale-blue and white, their heads covered with white wigs, stood guard at the door.

They were something else than merely ornamental. The shoulders under the blue velvet coats were like the shoulders of prize-fighters. The legs in the white silk stockings were as solid as those of a couple of farm-hands.

They also welcomed the American with a smile and left the way open for him.

Quite by accident—so one might have believed—there were a number of other retainers of the master of the house scattered along the stairway and about the hall on the first floor. Not all of them were in the blue and white livery. Some wore the more sober garb of huissiers and chamberlains.

There were others who wore no livery at all, yet who bore about them the unmistakable stamp of long service.

A chamberlain on duty at the head of the stairs signaled an official who guarded the door toward the front of the hall, and the official hurried forward.

"Good morning, M. Knowlton."

"Good morning, M. Martin. Is his majesty at liberty?"

"The ante-room is crowded, *monsieur*—a score, at least, and all of them important; but his majesty left word that he was to be informed as soon as you arrived, and suggested that you go around by the private way."

Chan went to the back of the hall, and there another guarded door was opened for him. He passed through a great salon all

gilt and crystal, lofty mirrors alternating with panels of yellow brocaded silk. After that there was a small, private hall in which two other guards rose to meet him.

They recognized him, bowed him on his way. He knocked on a door. He heard the call to enter.

He stood at last in the presence of him who had crossed the ocean with him on the mule-ship. The much guarded youth had sprung from his chair. They were shaking hands.

"How's everything going in London?"

"Great," Chan answered. "I've brought the papers. If it should come to a break—"

"The break in coming," said the Duke of Angoulême.

They talked for a while about what Knowlton had learned from the French Royalists who were still in England.

"And here in Paris?" Chan asked.

"Everything in readiness. It may be five days, it may be ten, before I shall be able to give the word. When I do so it will mean that the garrison of Paris, a few regiments apart, will be at our command. The Ministers, except two, and sixty deputies will be arrested. The President will be confined to the Elysée.

"While our people declare the *coup d'état* in the Chamber and the Senate, our troops will take charge of the Prefecture, the bridges, the principal *casernes,* and our ununiformed followers will be posting the proclamations all over town, starting up parades or riots as need be. With Paris in our grasp—"

The young Duke of Angoulême had got this far in what he was saying when his private secretary, who had momentarily left him alone, came hurrying back.

"Sire," said the secretary, "the Count du Barry and the Marquis de Warren have just arrived, are asking to see your majesty at his earliest possible convenience."

At the mention of the Marquis de Warren, Knowlton and the candidate for the throne exchanged a rapid glance.

"It's about Blanche," said Chan. "How is she?"

"Well—but anxious."

"Have you seen the marquis, since we left Lenoir?"

"No; and if I followed my own inclination I wouldn't see him now."

"But you must," said Chan. "The thing will have to be settled one way or another before very long. It isn't on my account, old man; but hers. I'll go. You can talk to them in peace—more freely than if I were here."

"No; you stay here."

"His majesty commands," said Chan, as he dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette.

Jean of Angoulême turned to his secretary who had withdrawn to a respectful distance.

"Tell the Count du Barry and the Marquis de Warren that I am waiting for them," he said. "Have M. Briec attend to as many of the other visitors as possible. Tell him that those who remain we shall have to luncheon."

The secretary withdrew. M. du Barry and the Marquis de Warren came in.

Both appeared to be somewhat surprised to find Knowlton there. The old count's salutation of him was none the less cordial for that. It was different with the Marquis de Warren. His greeting of the American was just barely polite.

"I have asked M. Knowlton to have the goodness to remain," said his majesty, amiably. "Pray be seated."

"It is as well as not that M. Knowlton hear what I have to say," began the Count du Barry, with dignity.

He inclined his head slightly to Chan, but his eyes were elsewhere. Chan drew a deep breath. He was pretty certain what was coming. He was not mistaken.

"What I have to say, his majesty permitting me, concerns him as well as the rest of us very vitally," the count went on.

"Proceed, my dear grandfather."

"If your majesty is the head of the French nation," the Count du Barry continued, "your majesty will be the last to attribute this to anything else than divine right."

"True!"

"Nor is the divine right strictly limited to his majesty's self. It extends to the blood royal wherever it is found. It is a violation of the divine right—an offense against morality, if you will permit me to so express myself—for a member whatsoever of the royal family to marry outside of the royal lineage. Such things have happened, of course, but your majesty is well aware that such unions have been a fruitful source of tragedy both to persons and to the state."

"You have reference to—"

"Your majesty's cousin, my granddaughter, *mademoiselle la princesse* Blanche de Vallières."

CHAPTER XVI.

LOVE AND HATE.

CHAN would have spoken, but he was forestalled by the Duke of Angoulême.

"I take it, my grandfather, that you are here on behalf of M. de Warren."

"And for the cause, your majesty."

"What has M. de Warren to say?"

"If your majesty will permit, I shall endeavor to make it clear," said the marquis.

His black mustache was waxed. He touched it nervously while his small black eyes flickered for an instant or two over Chan. He faced the Duke of Angoulême.

"Clearness above all," said the latter. "Go ahead, marquis."

"For almost two years it has been my honor and good fortune to be much in the society of Mlle de Vallières. She did not find my presence distasteful, if I dare say so. It is not necessary to refer either to my family or my fortune. Your majesty is perfectly familiar with such details. He will understand that there was no reason why I should not have been bold enough to consider my union with Mlle de Vallières as not impossible."

"That's the truth."

"This union became even more desirable, perhaps, when the circumstances permitted that other union. I refer to the coalition of the various Royalist and Nationalist groups brought about by the skill of your majesty's grandfather and the patriotism of our people. It was, in fact, with this desirable end in view that I happened to be at the Château Lenoir when the presence of your majesty was signaled aboard the ship from New Orleans."

"Had Mlle de Vallières been advised of your purpose?"

"Not yet; not in so many words. But surely no young lady could have suspected my presence there as due to any other cause. Briefly, I was delighted when it was proposed that we go out in the Reine Blanche to meet your majesty's ship. Mlle. de Vallières seemed equally delighted. I venture to add that I had received such encouragement, in fact, that I welcomed the chance to speak to your majesty concerning the matter at such an early opportunity. Unhappily, I was prevented from doing so by the circumstances which we all know."

"And then?"

"It is only since that date that Mlle. de Vallières has begun to shun me. Not only that, but from your majesty's self I have failed to get an answer."

"But Mlle. de Vallières says that she does not love you, my friend. I'm sorry, but she told me so herself."

"But you, sire, are the head of the family. I venture to recall that your majesty can command."

"And if I don't care to exercise this prerogative?"

"I can only attribute it to an undesirable element that has come into the lives of all of us," the marquis said, thickly.

"Do you refer to me?" Chan demanded, softly.

"Stop," said the Duke of Angoulême, raising his hand. "Why do you say that, marquis? Go ahead and speak frankly, man to man. We'll waive ceremony for the moment. The truth's the thing."

"Very well, sire. Let me say, then, that it has become a matter of common gossip in the Faubourg that there is a secret understanding between Mlle de Vallières and this American."

"You're an infamous liar," said Chan.

"On the very night that we were proclaiming you, sire, in the Château Lenoir, this honored guest of yours was taking advantage of your absence to make love to Mlle de Vallières. And as for you calling me a liar, sir, I suppose that I shall have to chastise you later for that—although it ought to be with a dog-whip. Your majesty, I crave pardon for thus speaking in your majesty's presence. But not even this Sieur Knowlton will have the effrontery to deny the truth of this latter accusation."

"He has not denied it, M. de Warren," said the duke. "He has already told me all the circumstances."

The Count du Barry had been hearing all of this with a self contained anger and amazement that made him shake. He was very rigid. He spoke, but it was with a visible effort.

"All of this is very unseemly. Let us not forget that, after all, the cause of our beloved France is the first consideration. I believe that this holy cause calls for sacrifice on the part of each of us. I have said as much to Mlle de Vallières herself. I hope that your majesty will put an end to all gossip, to all differences, by authorizing me to announce your cousin's engagement to the Marquis de Warren."

"Why the precipitation?"

"In the first place," said the count, "there are the very considerable elements which the marquis, both by reason of his family and his fortune, can assure to us when the critical moment arrives."

This allusion to his power encouraged the marquis to speak again for himself.

"And in the second place," he interposed, "it will be one reason the less for the continued presence of the American. I recognized him for what he was the very first day I saw him. Your majesty himself could not have been blind at the outrageous interest he displayed immediately in your majesty's cousin."

"Was that why you thought it better that he drown?" asked the duke, with a semblance of humor.

"Another of his falsifications!"

During all this Knowlton had been like a man with chills and fever, with alternate spells of cold and heat.

It wasn't on account of himself. He was sure of that. Whatever happened to him he was already infinitely richer than when he had left Bayou Lafarge.

He had started out in a quest of adventure and romance. These things never came without suffering. He had no complaint to make so far as he himself was concerned.

But it had hurt him each time the name of the Princess Blanche was mentioned. It made him altogether sick to think that he might become an instrument of disaster to this other person he so greatly loved, the Duke of Angoulême.

He got slowly to his feet.

"I feel that the time has come for me to withdraw," he said, "not only from this room, but from the house, and from my position of confidence in the service of the Duke of Angoulême. There is only one last privilege that I desire."

"Before you talk of that," said the duke, "let me tell you—and you other gentlemen—that if there has been continued friendship between M. Knowlton and Mlle. de Vallières it is because I have permitted it. There has been nothing dishonorable. God forbid even the thought of such a thing! M. Knowlton came to me like the true gentleman that he is and confessed to me that he loved Blanche. And Blanche, when I questioned her, told me that she loved M. Knowlton—".

"Jean," cried Chan, "don't say it!"

"I shall say it; and I shall also say that if M. de Warren thinks that he can bargain in an affair like this I shall undeceive him immediately."

"I ask you, for the love of Heaven, to settle these differences among you," pleaded Chan.

While he spoke, however, there was only one thought in his mind. Blanche had told some one else that she loved him.

Then it was true. Never could she have made such a declaration had it been a mere passing fancy, a trick of temperament.

He had dared to doubt, for, ever since that fateful night at the Château Lenoir he had been careful not to see her alone. While one part of his brain was expressing all this silently, another part of his brain was directing his speech.

"For I am going away," he was saying. "I agree with what M. du Barry said in the first place about divine right. It's either that or no royalty at all, and I was willing to die to see the Duke of Angoulême on the throne. Instead of dying I must merely go away. But I do beg one last privilege."

"The privilege is granted," said the duke, "but—"

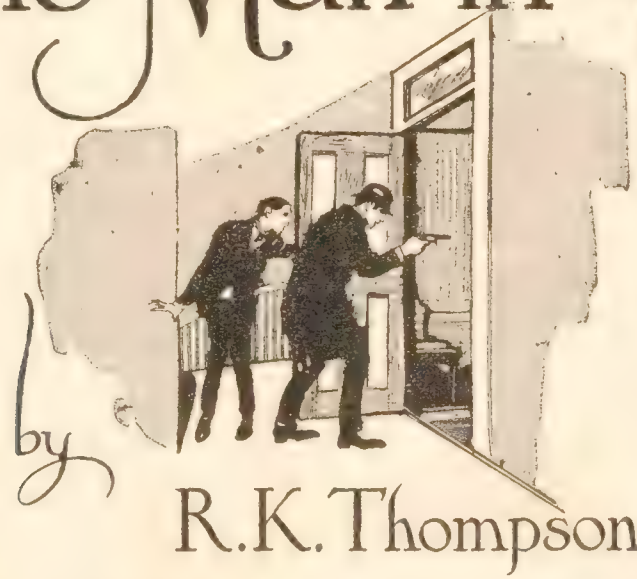
Before his majesty could complete the qualification of the favor, Knowlton had taken advantage of it.

"The privilege is this," he said softly.

He advanced a couple of steps, stood in front of the Marquis de Warren. He reached forward and caught the marquis by an ear and started to lift him up, much as a country schoolmaster might have done.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The Man in 419



by R. K. Thompson

HE came in on the five-eleven. Jerry, our bus-driver, told me that later. The brim of his soft felt hat was pulled down over his eyes. The collar of his overcoat—which seemed to cover a robust chest and pair of shoulders—was buttoned tight around his chin.

The rest of his face was bundled up in a white silk muffler, as though to protect it from the cold. Just his eyes, that were half hidden in the shadow of the pulled-down hatbrim, and the tip of his nose and his cheekbones, were all that showed.

The only thing I could feel sure of about him, as I swung the register around for him to sign, was his size. He ap-

peared to be a solid citizen, weighing two hundred pounds or over.

He set down the black leather valise he carried and scribbled something on the page. It wasn't a name. At least, I'd have defied anybody to make it out as such. I couldn't do it when I looked at the scrawl.

Pulling the muffler away from his mouth, without lowering it, the burly-looking stranger spoke in a voice that sounded as though it was packed in cotton from behind the folds of the scarf.

"My fingers are nearly frozen stiff. That's why I made such a botch of it," and he nodded down at the book.

But he didn't offer to translate the chicken-tracks he'd made into his name and where he hailed from. He let the muffler fall back over his mouth again. Then, as he saw me looking at it curiously, he lifted it away from his lips once more, and explained:

"I've got a nasty toothache. Don't want to get any more cold in it that I can help."

The muffler went back over his mouth. I hadn't been able to get a square look at his face yet. He'd signed his name in the register—if you could call such wretched writing *signing*—and yet I didn't know what it was.

Even what his voice sounded like, though he'd spoken to me twice, I couldn't tell. He was a complete mystery to me, so far. I didn't know then what a genuine mystery he was going to turn out to be—for a while.

Tapping the bell for George, who's the boss's nephew, and the only bellhop we've got, to wake up and come to the front, I gave him the key to 419 and sent him off with the man who had told me that he was keeping his face covered up because he had a toothache.

And then I turned my attention to the other guests that Jerry had brought up in the depot-bus from that same train.

I guess it must have been ten minutes later when, the last of them having been taken care of, I looked around from the key-rack to find another stranger in town standing at the desk.

"Good evening!" I said, taking the pen from behind my ear and dipping it in the ink, and at the same time pushing the register forward with my professional smile.

The man took the cigar out of the corner of his mouth and waved the pen and the book away with it.

"Nope," he said, in the quick way he had of talking. "I'm not going to stop with you—that is, if things are as I think they are. I just dropped in to get a little information, if you will oblige me."

He took the mate to that cigar out of his pocket and handed it across the desk to me. I took it, and him in, at the same time.

About five feet seven or eight, he was; thin, but with the look you must have noticed about some lean people of being made out of steel wire. A bundle of steel wires—that was what he reminded me of.

He was smooth-shaven, with a sharp nose and a pair of eyes that had a trick of squinting and unsquinting at the person he was talking with. His overcoat was of a gray mixture, and he wore a brown derby.

"Sure," I nodded at him. "What's the information you want?"

He straightened up briskly from the desk on which he'd been leaning with one arm.

"First," said he, "I'd like to take a look at the names of your latest arrivals in that register."

I pushed the book nearer to him.

"Help yourself," I said.

His eye ran down the names of those four or five guests who'd come in on the north-bound only fifteen minutes before, from the scrawl that the man I'd sent up to 419 had dashed off first, and then back to that illegible signature again.

"Who's this?" he asked, with his finger on 419's name.

"Search me!" I answered with a laugh. "I've seen some awful samples of handwriting in my time, but I pass this up as too many for *me!* The party told me that

his fingers were so stiff with the cold he couldn't steer the pen right."

The man in the brown derby carefully examined the wrapper of his cigar.

"What did he look like?"

I chuckled again.

"Well, that's where you can still search me!" I replied. "I didn't get a look at his face. He had it bundled up in a silk muffler, between his pulled-down hatbrim and the turned-up collar of his overcoat. He had a toothache, he claimed, that he was trying to keep the cold out of as much as possible."

"Um!" grunted the inquisitive stranger.

That was all he said; but somehow, from the way he said it, I gathered that he doubted that toothache story.

"How about his size?" he went on. "At least, you ought to be able to help me out there."

"Yes," I agreed, "I can. I've got a pretty good picture of him in my mind, so far as that goes. He's a thick-set individual. Must weigh every bit of two hundred and ten, and all of it good solid bone and muscle, too."

"Tall?"

"Well—no. Just about your own height."

The sharp-nosed man put the cigar back in the corner of his mouth, with a satisfied nod.

"I thought so," said he. "It's Sheldon, all right."

"Friend of yours?" I asked, drawing the book back and closing it.

There wouldn't be any more guests arriving that night. The five-eleven is the last train, in either direction, that stops at Claysville. I looked up at the man, finding he hadn't answered my question—and saw him looking at me.

"No," he said, and as he did so he slowly drew back his coat, showing me his vest, and ran his hands into his trousers pockets and stood there jingling his change. "I don't believe, if you were to tell him about me, that he'd consider I was a friend of his."

Pinned on his vest was a detective's badge!

"I'm after him," the sharp-nosed man went on. "Here," and he pulled a newspaper out of his overcoat pocket, "you can read the charge in this. That's it, where my thumb's touching. Robert J. Sheldon is your man with the toothache up-stairs."

I read the brief item, that contained only the statement of the fact that a man by the name of Robert J. Sheldon, for fourteen years the trusted head bookkeeper for the wholesale house of Miller & Sons, had skipped out with eight thousand dollars of the firm's cash, and that a reward of five hundred dollars was offered for his apprehension.

I looked up with envy at the man before me. Five hundred dollars was all I needed to make up the sum that would turn me from clerk to proprietor of that very hotel. You see, my boss had a bad case of asthma which the doctors had told him only a warmer climate could cure, so he offered to sell me the hotel at a bargain. And here was this man coming in to take the money I wanted right out from under my nose—the little fortune that might have been mine, if I'd had any idea beforehand of who the man was that I'd sent up to 419.

"Now, I'll tell you what to do," said the lean individual who'd shown me that badge of authority on his vest, as he rested one arm easily on the desk once more.

"Just send somebody up to ask him to step down here in the lobby for a minute," he instructed me. "Then I'll make the arrest, and I promise you it'll be done quietly, and probably without any of your other guests in the house being any the wiser."

I rang for George. I told him to go up and ask 419 to come down.

In three or four minutes George came back.

"I couldn't get any answer to my knock on the door," he reported.

I looked inquiringly at the man in the brown derby.

"He hasn't gone out," he snapped. "If he came down-stairs and went across the lobby without your seeing him, while you

were looking after those other guests from the train, you can take it from me that he couldn't have gone outside the hotel without my knowing it. For I stood across the street watching the door for at least five minutes after I saw him go through it. He's still in that room. Come ahead—if he won't come down to us, why we'll have to go up to him."

I left George to watch the desk and started after the sharp-nosed man who was leading the way to the stairs.

"Bring your pass-key," he ordered me over his shoulder.

I went back and got it. And then I followed at his heels up to the closed door of 419.

I'm not going to pretend that I was perfectly cool. Remembering the hefty build of the man I'd sent up to that room, who might put up a desperate fight to resist capture by this bloodhound of the law who was on his track, there was a tingle of excitement running down my spine as I waited to see what would happen, after my wiry companion's knuckles struck the panels of the door.

There was no answer to his knock. He rapped again. And then, drawing out something that glittered from his hip-pocket, he tried the knob. The door was locked.

"Let's have it," said the man beside me curtly, holding out his other hand for the pass key.

I gave it to him, and he fitted it in the keyhole and turned the lock. Then, bringing the revolver up from his side into full view and ready for business, he flung the door open and stepped across the threshold.

I heard him give a gasp of surprise. Rising on my tiptoes and looking over his shoulder, I understood why. The room was empty.

"He's flown the coop!" I blurted out.

The man with the gun in his hand said nothing. With his lips pressed tight together, he pushed the door shut with his foot. Then he spoke, shortly:

"Come out. You're caught."

There was a full minute of silence, while neither of us moved. The sharp-nosed man walked to the closet and jerked the door open. Then he got down on his knees and looked under the bed. The man he was searching for wasn't hiding in either place.

Getting up, he turned over on the bed where they'd been tossed down, the overcoat and the soft felt hat that I'd seen on the thick-set man when I'd first sent him up-stairs with George. Underneath the heavy, dark overcoat stood the black leather valise. The man in the brown derby tried the bag to see if it was locked. It opened easily in his hands—empty as the day it was bought.

"Do you suppose," I asked, my voice lowered with awe, "that he was carrying the money in it?"

"Yep; that's what he took the boodle away in. I've been shadowing him ever since, and so he hasn't had a chance to 'plant' it anywhere. He could have hidden the bills about his person easily enough, though, when he skipped out this way."

He was squinting and unsquinting his eyes around the room in that way he had, from under a puzzled frown. Impatiently he struck one fist in his palm.

"But where has he gone?" he demanded. "Where *could* he have gone? It's not fifteen minutes since I watched him come into this hotel. And it's less than that since you showed him up to this room—"

"He must have found out that you were on his trail, eh?" I broke in.

"I suppose so. Though I'll swear I can't see how he did. I was careful not to let him suspect that I was shadowing him. So careful, in fact, that I pretty nearly lost him a couple of times on the way here."

He continued to look around the room as he went on musingly: "How he could have got away with the entrance of the hotel watched, I can't see—but wait. There's a back door to this house, isn't there?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then that's how he must have gone! While you were busy at the desk he slipped down-stairs and across the lobby without being noticed, and walked out the back way—"

"Where to?" I retorted. "He couldn't get away, even if he got out of the hotel. I'll tell you something about the way the trains up here run that perhaps you don't know. There's nothing, even in the line of a slow freight, that stops here before to-morrow morning at six-fifteen. But that's not all. There's only one way a person could get to the back door. By going through the dining-room, the pantry, and the kitchen. I'll leave it to you; could a guest in a hotel show up in the kitchen without rousing suspicion as to what he was doing there?"

"Send down-stairs—no, you'd better go down yourself, while I stay up here to watch this room," ordered the sharp-nosed man, "and find out if any of the help saw him going through the kitchen. That'll settle that point."

I was on my way to the door when he stopped me.

"Say—is that kid you left down there at the desk a bright one?"

"Did you ever know a bell-boy that wasn't?" I countered.

"All right. Having taken our man up here to this room, maybe he'll have a better idea of what he looks like than you say you were able to get. You tell him to keep his eyes peeled for him. If he catches sight of him, he's to hop up here, quick, and let us know. He may be hiding in some of the other rooms or corridors, and waiting for a chance to slip out when he thinks the coast is clear."

Inside of five minutes I was back in the room.

"There's a *chef* and four waitresses in the kitchen, where they've been for the past thirty-five minutes," I reported, "and none of them's seen anything of our friend. So he didn't go out of the back way."

"Then that leaves the roof."

"Yes, and that's where he'd be left if he went up on it," I grinned. "As you maybe noticed, this hotel is five stories high—the tallest building in the block. The roofs of all the houses around it are a good thirty feet below ours; and I'd like to see him land on one of them without breaking a leg."

"But that's where he may be hiding."

"Go ahead up and see," I suggested, "if you want to."

He put the revolver back in the pocket of his gray overcoat.

"I will," he snapped. "You told the boy to watch the front entrance? And how about that back door?"

"The *chef* and the waitresses will report to us if anybody that hasn't any business there shows up in the kitchen," I answered. "And George is keeping his eye on the front door. If he's still in the house, he can't get out now without being seen."

"Well, he's still in it!" retorted the sharp-nosed man positively. "I watched the front entrance before I came in, and he hadn't come out of it. You've found out that he couldn't have gone through the back way. He's here somewhere in the hotel. And we'll smoke him out."

He came back, stamping the snow from the roof off his shoes, five or ten minutes later.

"Well?" I questioned

"He's not there, and hasn't been. There were no tracks in the snow, and besides that the roof-door was locked from the inside. But I hunted around every chimney and behind the water-tank, just the same."

He squinted and unsquinted his eyes at my face. I asked:

"Well, what are you going to do now?"

"Stay here," he replied, suiting the action to the word by sitting down on the side of the bed, "while you make the rounds of all the rooms in the house. You'll find he's hiding in one of them. But you don't need to feel any uneasiness about coming face to face with him. He won't suspect that you know the police are after him. Just come back here quietly after you've located him and tell me where he is."

I came back in a half-hour. But it wasn't to give him the information he wanted. For the simple reason that I'd gone through all the halls and to every room, whether occupied or not, without finding the party I'd been sent for.

I was convinced by that time, whether the man I'd left in 419 was it or not, that the absconding bookkeeper was no longer in the hotel.

It gave me a creepy feeling to think how he could have gone out with all the exits watched. But that was nothing to the weirdness of the situation as it was presented to me by the man in the brown derby, who was standing in the middle of the room, when I came back into it.

"Do you see the same thing that I do?" he blurted out, before I could tell him of my failure to find hide or hair of the man he'd sent me in search of.

I turned and looked down at the carpet over by the door, where his finger was pointing and his eyes were wildly staring. The key with the leather number-tag on it that I'd given to George when he'd taken the husky-looking stranger up to that room, was lying on the floor!

"I must have pushed it out with the pass-key!" gasped the man who wore the detective's badge. "The door was locked *on the inside!*"

He looked at me, and I looked back at him. His jaw had fallen, and I guess mine hung slack, too—though I wasn't conscious of it if it did. The man we were hunting for *couldn't* have gone out of that room through the only door in it while that door was locked!

There was the window. We both rushed over to it and found that it was locked on the inside, too. Once more the sharp-nosed man looked at me without a word, while I looked back at him in the same speechless amazement.

If the man had left the room—but he *had* left it; there was no corner in it where he could have hidden that we hadn't already looked into. He was gone, and the stolen eight thousand dollars he'd carried into the hotel had gone with him.

But the question was no longer where he had gone. It was how he had got out of that room. That anybody could do so under the circumstances was an absolute impossibility. It was plain, though, that the impossible had happened.

The lean man in the brown derby sat down again on the side of the bed, and dropped his hands on his knees in a gesture of surrender.

"Well, this beats anything I've ever run up against before!" he remarked.

I was growing excited in earnest. I had just as good a chance now as the man who wore that detective's badge under his gray overcoat had to get that five hundred dollars. The man he told me he was after had given him the slip, somehow. If I could find out how he'd done it, and nab him, I could claim the reward myself.

But how could that stout-looking man I'd sent up to 419, or anybody else, get out of a room leaving the one door and the one window in it locked from the inside?

And—admitting what the proof of my own eyes showed me was the case, that he had actually done so—where could he have gone? He wasn't in the hotel. And yet nobody had seen him leave it, with the only two ways of getting out of the place closely watched.

I looked around slowly at the man who was still sitting on the side of the bed, and found his eyes squinting and unsquinting at my face again.

And then the solution of the whole thing burst on me. I don't know how it happened. But all at once the mystery became clear as day. I kicked myself for not having thought of it before.

"I take it," the man in the brown derby questioned me, "that you didn't find him in any of the other corridors or rooms, or you'd have said so before?"

I steadied my voice before I spoke.

"No, I didn't find him there."

I met his gaze again.

"What do you make of this?" I asked, with a sweep of my hand around the room.

He rose, repeating his helpless gesture.

"I give up," he answered. "It's too much for me. I can usually bring back the man I go after—but not when a miracle's rung in on me. And that is what this amounts to.

"The scamp has beaten me, some way. I guess I'll have to kiss that reward-money good-by. I wanted it, too; it was what brought me all the way from New York, and the small but live private detective agency I run there. But I'll have to go back without it.

"You say there's no train out of here till to-morrow morning?" he went on, moving over to the door. "But I can hire a rig, can't I, to drive me over to the nearest town where a train does stop, and that I can connect with to take me back home?"

"Yes, you can drive over to Farmington, eight miles from here," I assured him. "I'll step around to the livery stable and make the arrangements for you."

I shot down-stairs and out of the hotel, bareheaded, and without stopping to put on my overcoat. It wasn't to the livery stable that I went, though; and when I came back I wasn't alone.

The lean, sharp-nosed man in the brown derby started across the lobby toward the door as he saw me come in.

"Well, so-long—" he began in that crisp way of his.

"Stop!" I cried out, my voice jumping with excitement, as I beckoned for Sim Willetts, the town constable, who'd come in at my heels, to step forward. "I wouldn't be in a hurry to leave here just yet, if I were you," I added to the man who wore the detective's badge—"Mr. Robert J. Sheldon!"

He gave a kind of quick gasp and retreated a step, his cheeks the color of ashes.

"A pretty slick trick you were working!" My finger was leveled accusingly at his face. "A brand-new one, too, I guess. A runaway thief, pretending to be a detective on his own trail! When the man he was supposed to be following gave him the slip, nobody'd ever suspect him of being the crook when he gave up the chase and walked away.

"You thought you'd leave your trail broken off right here, and cold, when the real detectives came along didn't you? Oh, yes, it was a clever scheme you hit on—of coming in here with your face bundled up, and even your voice disguised by the muffler around your mouth, with that heavy overcoat up-stairs on over the one you're wearing now, which made you look all of sixty pounds heavier than you really are, and that derby in the bag which you put on instead of the soft felt hat up in the room. Then you stepped out and locked the door and put the key in your pocket. Afterward, when I left you alone in the room, you dropped the key on the floor where you pointed it out to me—Grab him, Sim!" I broke off.

The thief had darted his hand into the pocket of that gray overcoat, where I knew the revolver was lying. The constable had his arms pinned down to his sides, in a bearlike hug, in another minute.

"You were clever," I went on to the sharp-nosed man, when he'd ceased struggling, "but you weren't quite clever enough. Like all criminals, you made one mistake—that of overlooking the fact of a hotel clerk's being likely to notice little things about people, by force of habit. I noticed something about you, not five minutes ago up-stairs in that room. It's those two little red marks on either side of your nose, close to your eyes. That, and your habit of squinting.

"A bookkeeper, who'd been adding up figures for fourteen years, might wear glasses and be near-sighted without them. But a detective—well, he wouldn't have anything the matter with his eyes, the principal asset in his trade! That's how I got on to you, my friend, the marks from your glasses, and it's why you're where you are now."

Sim's handcuffs snapped around the absconding bookkeeper's wrists. And as they did so, I knew that I'd soon be giving up my job as a clerk for something better—the place of proprietor.

His Mad Move on the Movies

by Stephen Brandish

Author of "The Name of Martin Hoffman," etc.

The Tale of a Wild Conspiracy

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

JAMES H. DARTON, fiction writer, wins something over a hundred thousand dollars in Wall Street as the result of an investment he has allowed his cousin to make for him a year previous. His friend, Thomas Morely, is with him when he hears the good news and has the sum delivered to him in cash. Almost immediately arrives Bostwick, partner of the father of Sibyl Dane, to whom Darton is engaged. Curtly he tells Darton that Sibyl has married another man in Chicago, where she has been visiting. On top of this comes the news of the turning down of a motion-picture scenario on which Darton had banked big. The two blows seem to turn his brain, and he proceeds to hire expensive offices from which he sends out letters and telegrams to thousands of writers for the movies, bidding them strike, and adding that he will pay their salaries out of a ten-million-dollar fund. The replies are to be telegraphed in at his expense on Thursday morning, but by that time he has had opportunity to become sane again. However, the thing has gone so far that there is no stopping it, apparently. The climax arrives when a man representing the amalgamation of several picture interests insists on seeing Darton, and tells him that unless he winds up his scheme between three and five that very afternoon, he, Darton, will cease to be.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OMINOUS OUTLOOK.

THOMAS MORELY awoke quite suddenly from his trance. Gazing up he saw the perfect stranger shrugging his shoulders and, rising, saw Jimmy Darton clutching the arms of his chair.

"So that you have really taken my meaning, I think that my errand is done," the mystery said. "Before five o'clock."

Jimmy Darton was on his feet.

"That'll do!" he cried. "I don't know who you are, but you can't get away with that sort of thing around here. Tommy, will you have Hammond take this man to the street and hand him over to the nearest—"

"One minute, Mr. Darton," the stranger chuckled. "It is almost pathetically plain that you haven't lately looked over the character of your visitors out there. I

have. I have tried to give you two good, long hours in which to make your getaway; but just as soon as Hammond begins taking me to the street, I shall raise my very strong voice and brand you the fake I believe you to be. I *think* that after that there will be no need of any further orders from me, trending toward your —er—elimination."

With that he turned on his heel, tucked the shiny stick under his arm and walked out.

Jimmy Darton looked at his friend, but before he could speak Hammond stepped into the room.

"That gent that just went out," he said.

"What about him?"

"Johnson reports—"

"Who's Johnson?" the chairman asked.

"One of the ten extra detectives I sent for this morning, when things began to liven up," explained Morely. "I thought they'd better circulate among the crowd and keep down excitement. Go on, Hammond."

"Well, Johnson reports that this party that just left stopped and spoke—just a word or two, I take it—to three of that gang out there, sir, and he said he made some kind of signs to four more that he could see."

"And then?"

"Then he kept right on his way, sir, and went down in the next car."

"But that ain't what I came in to tell you, sir. It's about Dixon, the boss of this building. He's sent up for you three times; once he tried to get in here. I wouldn't let 'em bother you."

"Well, whatever he wants, I won't pay it!" the chairman said, in a harsh, excited rasp. "Tell him that from me, Hammond!"

"Well, as I understand it, it's the other way around, sir. He has a check for a thousand dollars he wants to give you."

"What?"

"Yes, sir, it's your rent. Mr. Dixon says half the tenants on the two floors above and below and all the tenants on this floor are kicking about the noise and excitement. He says if this mob ain't cleared out to stay out for good, you'll have to vacate before seven o'clock. He said he'd take a chance on the legality and put everything here on the sidewalk, once he had handed you that check in the presence of witnesses, whether you accepted it or not. I—I think he meant it."

Darton clutched his unfortunate head.

"Why did he have to say that?" he cried irresponsibly. "All I've been thinking of this last ten minutes was that I could hide in here all night, while you fellows and the police got the crowd out of the neighborhood!"

Hammond smiled dubiously.

"Well—I dunno, boss," he mused. "Our boss ain't stuck on having us call in the regular police, when we've taken a private job like this. It don't look extra well, you know. Then again, I can tell you honest that us fellers'll never be able to hold off that bunch all night."

There being nothing further to be said on that subject, he drifted out again, permitting just the proper amount of mob sound to ooze through in his passing. James H. Darton smiled pallidly at his best friend.

"I want to confess to you, Tommy, before anything untoward happens," said he, "that *I'm scared!*"

"Well, of all the jackass talk that ever left your lips, that particular string gets the silver cup!" the artist said angrily, as he lit a cigar. "You're not going to die, you idiot!"

"What then?" the chairman asked, without much interest.

"You're going to get out of here."

"How?"

"By the private elevator—by the fire-escape—by the chimney, if they have one! And as soon as you're out of this building, you'll have to get out of New York for a while."

"Yes, I think you're right about that," the author admitted. "But it can't be done."

His chin on his clenched hand, he stared from the window; though further

rumblings came faintly, he seemed not even to hear them now. Morely tapped his shoulder.

"Cheer up," he said. "Of course it can be done. You've got money enough to live on for years, even if you had to hide that long. You can go to Cuba or—"

"Tommy," the chairman of the American Committee sighed, "do you realize that, just on the other side of that door, lies the side hallway of this building? Do you quite understand that as soon as it dawns on somebody that they can get in this way, I'm going to be mobbed?"

Morely laughed a little.

"They're not wise to that yet, anyway," he said. "I've had the men tell them that there's an L in here and that your private office is on the other side of the building, Jim. I'm not so much worried about that; we'll get you out one way or another. It's what you're going to do then. You might skip to Rio."

"Brazil?"

"Of course. One of the Pan-American liners leaves for there at seven; I happen to know that because I looked up the mails yesterday when I was writing to Chesborough, down in Rio," the artist said thoughtfully. "See here, Jimmy. Suppose I go down to the pier and get a stateroom for you and have them ready to hide you the second you go aboard? I can fix that, if you'll give me a couple of hundred."

The chairman of the American Committee looked at him without interest, shrugged his shoulders and, finally, tossed his bulging wallet to the desk.

"Try it if you want to, old man," he said. "I don't think there's a chance in a thousand of making it, and I don't care much whether there is or not, but you're better off with that roll than I."

"I don't want to take all of it."

"I want you to—that's only the eighty thousand, anyway," sighed Jimmy. "And Tommy!"

"Yes?"

"If anything untoward *should* happen to me—something will, but I'll put it that way to spare your feelings—if something should happen to me, I want you to keep that wad. It's all yours, old man."

"But—"

"Salt it away somewhere until you see just the right chance for investment, and then use it to provide for your old age," Darton went on mournfully, with one hand on his friend's shoulder. "And just remember one thing, Tommy; if ever you feel yourself falling in love with anything in skirts, sit down in a secluded spot and eat a full can of rat poison. Will you promise that?"

He looked earnestly at his friend, yet his friend merely delivered a sharp slap on the crown of Darton's head and picked up his hat and coat.

"Forget it!" said he, quite unfeelingly. "Three years from now you'll be in a hammock in the *patio,* smoking a cigar a foot long and wondering why the little black-haired twins beside the fountain look so much like their mother. And stay in here, Jimmy; you can't get out, anyway, because I've given orders to have you kept here."

Plainly a cynic, he slid into his coat and opened the side door of the office cautiously; only a minute or two back, steps had been tramping up and down that corridor—steps that had strayed from the overflow meeting in the main corridor outside Darton's door—but luck was with Morely at the moment.

He listened and glanced out carefully; then he slipped out and the heavy spring latch clicked behind him.

Darton was quite alone, with the awful penalty of his madness surging and growling not fifty feet away. Head in his hands, he sat and began to think.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FINAL CALLER.

MORELY returned so suddenly that the door had closed behind him almost as his key clicked on the outer side!

He was flushed and breathless and his

eye glittered; quite dramatically he listened for an instant, hand upheld for silence, before his sharp:

"I've fixed everything, Jim; the side elevator here is waiting with the door closed until you knock three times."

"Very well," Darton murmured wearily.

"And you'll find a taxi waiting at the curb next the trust company door downstairs," the helpful friend went on. "You'll know it because the driver is reading a paper and has another part of it under his foot, on the floor and sticking out of the cab. I got your stateroom, too—a nice outside room—and I had a private chat with the first officer. The rest of them looked sort of soured, but this chap's right as they make 'em, and he'll be ready to whisk you out of sight the second you land on the boat. Now get out, Jimmy. It's only a matter of a very few minutes before they decide to come in here and mob you."

"Very well," and Darton rose. "They're moving around out in that side corridor now."

"Not many of them," the artist said nervously. "You can walk straight through and be in the car before they recognize you, I think. If not, I'll be there to keep 'em off for the few seconds you need. Only don't wait, Jim! Hammond's partner says that several of them have been talking of searching the whole floor for you, and the detectives have just managed to steer them off, and no more.

"I wasn't going to scare you, Jim, but you need a spur, I guess; they did smash one law office at the other end of the floor all to bits, half an hour ago. Dixon's nearly crazy; the reputation of the building is up to him, and he says he'd see you murdered ten times over before he'd have the reserves called in here and a really big fight started, and—get out, will you?"

Darton extended a cold hand to his old friend.

"I'm going, and you stay here. I don't care a rap whether they get me or not, but I don't want you pounded to a pulp, Tommy. Good-by, old man, and thank you, and some time try to forgive me for all the crazy rumpus I started here—or for getting you into it, anyway."

"And here's your money, Jim, and now —*run!*" the artist said feverishly. "Good-by, and bless you; send me a wireless as soon as you're safe, and now *go!*"

His hot anxiety infected Darton.

"I'm going," he said. "I—Lord! What's that?"

"It is only I," said the exhausted voice of Miss Daymore. "I can't stand it any longer, Mr. Darton. I resign. So do the other girls."

Darton snatched out three from his collection of hundred dollar bills.

"Resignations accepted, and bless you," he said swiftly. "Split that among the girls, and believe me when I tell you that I'm sorry to have let you in for all the excitement. Good-by."

"Good-by, Mr. Darton, and—oh, yes! The card, sir. The lady insisted that I bring it in to you."

Whereupon Miss Daymore extended the card, and Darton, under the natural impression that some lady scenario writer was more insistent than the rest, gave it the merest glance—and then, catching his breath, stared suddenly at it—and next, with the most peculiar little cluck in his throat, snatched it!

Because, while there was only one word on that card, the word, in pencil, was "Sibyl!"

"Who—where—" began the chairman.

"Never mind who it is, I'll see her," the artist put in. "You get out, Jim, while it's still possible, and—"

"Wait!" Jimmy Darton said, with a mournful smile. "What do you suppose she's doing here?"

"Who?"

"Sibyl."

"I don't know," said Morely, and shrugged his shoulders, "but I should say that it was in devilish bad taste."

Darton, quite relaxed again, gazed long and hard at his friend, yet with no trace of resentment.

"Rotten taste, yes, and still—" he began, and then straightened up abruptly. "Ask her to step in, please."

"Jimmy! You're not going to waste time *now* talking to a girl who—"

The inscrutable misery in Darton's eye gave pause to his friend, as the door closed behind Miss Daymore.

"Thomas," said the chairman of the American Committee, "if I make a getaway, I'm going a long distance and I'm never coming back. If I don't make a getaway and they don't get the police here in time, I'm going to make an even longer trip, I fancy. Don't screw your face up like that; there will be no emotion scene here—or elsewhere! But before I go, I've got to have just one last look at her, Tom!"

It really seemed to be final. Darton, expressionless, was standing there beside his desk and waiting. His eyes ached for one sight of the Sibyl who had been his, and he gazed and gazed at the doorway—then grew colder of expression, for Sibyl had appeared.

Ever since his first glimpse of her he had known that she was far the loveliest of earthly girls, but hurrying in now with anxious eyes and cheeks flushed, she was even lovelier than of old! She nodded at Thomas Morely, in the smallest fraction of a second, and Thomas Morely for a time thereafter ceased to exist.

She came up to Jimmy Darton and then, noting his cold eye at last, stopped short and faltered:

"Why, Jimmy, what is wrong?"

"Nothing," the chairman informed her suavely. "Why?"

"But—"

"I am going away in a few minutes," Jimmy went on. "If there is anything I can do for you before I leave, I am yours to command."

He smiled, a chilly smile, one which held no interest in the beautiful girl before him, who looked around wildly and then cried:

"Jimmy, what are you doing here?"

"At the moment, waiting to learn how I can serve you," he answered with a bow.

"I know, but what does it all mean? What has happened? What is this nonsense in all the papers about a committee for—for—what is it for, Jimmy?"

Darton merely shrugged his shoulders.

"That's rather too long for discussion just now," he replied. "I haven't read the stories myself, but I presume they are accurate in the main."

There was no doubt about the sound which came from Sibyl; it was a stifled sob, largely of excitement.

"And why do you talk like that?" she hurried on. "What is it that you've done, Jimmy? That crowd—that horrible crowd out there! I've been among them for ten minutes and they're saying the most terrible things about you! They're threatening to hurt you, Jimmy!"

The chairman of the committee merely laughed wearily.

"Don't let that concern you," he said frigidly. "They can't do any more harm to me than has been done by—"

He had all but said it! He broke off with a jerk and gazed at her who had once been his own.

He found her, curiously enough, with brimming eyes, which looked real fright into his own. For another thing, Sibyl, who had stopped short some eight or ten feet from him, was moving swiftly toward him; yes, and now she caught at his arm with both hands and choked out:

"Jimmy, what is it? Why do you talk like that and look at me like that, as if you hated me? Jimmy, sweetheart, *what's the matter?*"

James Darton's heart stopped! A great, shuddering breath left him and his teeth ground together.

He had hoped, had meant, to gaze on her for a moment and then carry the picture through all the rest of life—Sibyl, the fickle, the wife of another, but still Sibyl. Now she had taken even that small consolation from him and shown him her true self! She, who had married a wealthy young man rather than become the wife of a poor and rising one, was actually making love to him!

She was shameless and—Darton tried to shake off the hand.

The hand refused to be shaken off. It happened to be the left hand and very tightly encased in a white kid glove. Now, there was nothing remarkable about this, of course; even though it belonged to another, it was the sweetest, roundest little hand in the world, and Jimmy Darton hesitated a second or so before shaking at it again.

And as he hesitated, his lips parted suddenly and his eyes ducked down nearer the hand. On that third finger was the diamond that marked their agreement—*and it was the only ring!*

"Where's your—where's your ring?" James Darton cried.

"What, dear?" Sybil said, rather with difficulty, for the tears were overflowing.

"Your ring! Your ring! Your wedding ring!" cried Jimmy Darton.

This time Sibyl's emotion overcame her, for she knew her James to be insane! She slipped her arms about his neck and held him tight, as if to quiet him.

"Jimmy dearest, I—I have no wedding ring!" she said. "Jimmy, my poor boy! Don't you remember, dear? We're not married yet!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL ABOARD.

"GIRL, you're *not* married?" Darton fairly howled the question.

"Hush, dear! Oh, hush!" Sibyl said brokenly; and then, remembering Thomas Morely, she whirled upon him.

"You are his friend!" she said, with swift anger. "You've always called yourself that, Mr. Morely! Why have you let him, in this condition, go without medical attendance? Why wasn't Dr. Kerrigan called and—"

"Wait, Sibyl! Wait, dear! He isn't to blame," Jimmy cried jubilantly. "He—here! Look at me! Say it again; you're *not* married?"

"Married to whom?"

"Rossmore, of course."

"What Rossmore, Jimmy?" Sibyl asked blankly.

"The young one with the tinplate millions."

The blankness in her beautiful eyes gave place to a firmness, a concern that was almost maternal.

"No, dear. I haven't seen him for ten years—not since I was a little girl. It doesn't matter, though, Jimmy dear. Perhaps if Mr. Morely will call a cab, mother will come and let me take care of you for to-night, or until we can get a competent nurse. Can you be depended on for that, Mr. Morely?" she concluded, icily. "Because, if it is—"

She said no more. Jimmy Darton's arms, having ached for the feel of her these many bitter hours, ached no more; they were about Sibyl now and bidding fair to crush her as he rattled off:

"He isn't to blame, Sibyl—he had nothing at all to do with it or—say! I'm going to yell! I'm going to cheer! I'm going out there and knock every one of that mob who's been threatening my life, just to let off steam and show them that I'm still among those present.

"But I'll save just one good punch for Bostwick and if it doesn't seem too cowardly when I come face to face with the old scoundrel—Sibyl, you don't know what I've been suffering!"

"Jimmy, please!" the girl pleaded breathlessly, "Jimmy, you're hurting me! What are you saying about Bostwick? Do you mean father's partner?"

"Of course! He said that you'd eloped with Rossmore."

"When?"

Darton calmed himself in a measure.

"Days ago, dear. That's what drove me crazy. He said that you had married somebody else and gone to Japan—I think it was. He wanted me to take a job with the firm, somewhere out in the Philippines, and start for the place that very night."

"And you believed, Jimmy . . . ?"

"Could you believe anything else, when

the man sat there and told me in so many words? He said that you had been engaged to Rossmore, once upon a time, and —"

"Jimmy dear, are you quite sure he said that?" Sibyl inquired, and her breathing grew more rapid.

Out in the big office really the most ominous growl of all arose suddenly. Darton, having listened to it for an instant, threw out his hands and, in spite of all, grinned.

"Sibyl," said he, "do you think that if I hadn't been entirely sure of what he said and that you were lost to me forever, I could have started anything like *this?*"

Sibyl Dane turned from him suddenly and picked up his telephone. The chairman of the American Committee started as he caught her eye while she was calling for the number. Like most lovers in this world, he had not even suspected that that particular eye could glint, but just now it seemed to be shedding fiery sparks.

"Bostwick and Dane?" said Sibyl. "I wish to speak to Mr. Dane. This is Miss Dane."

Then, after a little pause during which Jimmy Darton blinked and his friend Thomas Morely grinned, the honeyed tone went on: "Oh, father? This is Sibyl. Yes, we're back. Father, did Mr. Bostwick call on Jimmy Darton a few days ago?"

It may have been merely an eccentricity of the telephone receiver, but what sounded exactly like a frightened yelp rattled its receiver; there were words, too, and Sibyl listened to them impatiently with lips compressed.

"Yes, I know you're busy, father, but this is very important to me. . . . No, dear, to-night will not do; I don't bother you very often during business hours, dad, but this time I want five minutes. . . . Yes, what I want to know is, exactly what Mr. Bostwick said to Jimmy and how he happened to say it. . . . Yes, everything! Because it was the most cowardly, contemptible—"

Here the diaphragm took to rattling again and Sibyl listened on, now and then stimulating the flow, presumably, of confession at the other end by a word or two. Minutes passed, and still the buzzing went on; presently it died down and Sibyl said:

"No, I don't think Mr. Bostwick is all to blame, because he'd never have done it but for your suggestion; and if you really regretted it, you'd have gone to Jimmy and told him the whole truth and apologized just as humbly as you knew how! . . . Yes, you *would!*" said Sibyl. "And he's the most horrible old man, I ever . . . good-by, father!"

Earth's fairest daughter turned back to her beloved with lips still tight.

"I learned the truth," she said. "Father has always felt that you weren't quite rich enough to marry, Jimmy—he didn't like the idea of your writing, anyway—and that dreadful Bostwick offered to settle the whole thing for him and get you out of the way and . . . I couldn't have believed it of father."

"And there wasn't a word of truth in it, eh?" Morely cried.

Sibyl was looking straight into her Jimmy's eyes.

"There's only one steamer every three months to that Bingalong place!" she said. "Just four steamers and four mails a year!"

Darton laughed.

"Maybe your father wasn't very much to blame," he said. "I'm not worth a girl like you, but—I'm hanged if anything like Bostwick shall take you from me, Sibyl! But, Lord! I don't care now! I'll forgive the whole world; I'll forgive even Bostwick! It's all over now and we—we can take up life again. . . . I guess I'll go out and explain to that mob that all bets are off," he ended quite cheerfully.

"And have yourself torn to bits?" Morely cut in.

"Would they really do that?" cried Sibyl.

"They've been trying to find him, for no other purpose, this last hour or so and —here, you!" said Tommy. "We're not

going to let you try it, Jimmy. Wait a minute and I'll have Hammond in and get the latest news from the front."

He grinned excitedly as he slipped into the next room, for it was plain that Jimmy Darton could not follow without a struggle. Sibyl, her eyes round with real fright, was clinging to Jimmy Darton's arm as a drowning man clings to the last of his raft; and Jimmy after a moment of tugging slipped an arm around her and relaxed.

The bodyguard of the American Committee's chairman was just about to enter the inner office; and if he had been perturbed before, he was downright anxious now. His clothing was rumpled, too, and as he brushed past Morely he spoke directly to his chief:

"Say, if you're going to get out of this, boss, you'll have to move fast."

"Why?"

"Some of 'em are wise to this side door, Mr. Darton, in spite of all the boys could do in the way of lying. There's a bunch outside at this minute, wondering whether to take a chance and smash through."

"But what do they want?" Sibyl cried.

Hammond grinned faintly.

"Well, this here situation is kind of tangled, miss, and it changes pretty frequent and peculiar," he said. "Up to the last fifteen or twenty minutes, most of 'em seemed to want to know whether Mr. Darton really had ten million dollars on him and whether they could get it and divide it up. That's as near as I can make it out from what they've been yapping about. Everybody out there wanted to get paid from one hundred to ten thousand dollars, and they were ready to start trouble if they didn't get it."

"We know that, but—" Darton began.

"Well, things are different this last fifteen minutes, boss. There's a red-headed guy out there now making a speech, and he's making such a hit with it that the boys don't dare pull him down and throw him out."

"A speech about what?"

"You, boss. This here guy with the strawberry top is telling them that the whole thing's a plot of the people who make moving pictures; he's telling them that the whole idea is for them to throw up their jobs and strike—and most of 'em have done that now, I take it—so that the people that have been hiring could take them back at half pay and they'd have to accept that or starve to death. He's getting 'em crazy, too; they sound like a pack o' wolves—hear 'em?"

They did indeed hear them.

"And he's backing it up with a great line of argument, boss—begging your pardon. He's telling them to look at the furniture and the way the place is tricked out, if they want proof; he's telling them that you never had the price of one of them desks, up to a couple of days ago and . . . say, boss, I don't want to scare the lady, but you better beat it."

"Why?" Sibyl asked again.

"Well, as soon as this party finishes his speech, they're going to search the floor for Mr. Darton, and they're likely to hurt anything they stumble over and . . ."

"All right," Jimmy said, his smile quite gone. "You get this lady out first, Hammond, and if I can—"

"This lady isn't going," Sibyl announced. "Not without you, Jimmy Darton."

"But—"

"Not one inch!" said the girl he had fancied faithless. "If they kill you, they'll kill me, too! I will not—"

"I've got it!" Thomas Morely exploded. "Get out together, and when you're out, keep on going—elope!"

"But we couldn't—"

"Of course you could!" corrected the gifted artist. "Let the captain of the steamer marry you, when you're outside the three mile limit, if there isn't a parson on board. Jimmy was just going to make for South America, Miss Dane, and—"

"Yes, but that would never do!" Darton objected. "No, I'm going out there and you two sneak Miss Dane out by the side elevator and—"

"Nobody will sneak Miss Dane any-

where without you, Jimmy, and it will do very nicely if there's no other way," Sibyl put in contentedly. "Which is the safe way out?"

Hammond grinned again, quite mirthlessly.

"There ain't any, lady. The mob's out in that side hallway now and there's no getting by 'em. The best thing to do is to turn in a call for the police, and if they're here in time, it'll be all right."

"And if they're not here in time?" Sibyl asked.

"Well, then—I guess it won't be all right, lady," the bodyguard confessed.

It was Thomas Morely's brilliant afternoon.

"I'll fix that for you, too!" he said. "This is it, Hammond: let one of your men put on Mr. Darton's coat and hat—they're both light gray and conspicuous—and then circulate a rumor that he's going to try a break through the front room—see? Then, while the man is going out that way, we can leave by the side door. During the excitement, you know."

"And what becomes of the man who tries it?" Hammond asked dryly.

"Let your prize-fighter try it!" cried Jimmy Darton.

The bodyguard pondered for some seconds.

"He might, at that, for money!" he muttered. "Wait a second and I'll see if I can sneak him in here without attracting too much notice."

Riley was with him when he reappeared. Riley was about Jimmy Darton's build, and smooth-shaven; but there the resemblance ended, for in a beauty contest Jimmy Darton would have had infinitely more chance of taking honors.

Riley looked over the gathering with a sour grin and demanded:

"What is this stuff Hammond's giving me about making a break in your clothes?"

Darton, somehow, could not quite face him.

"Well, the idea was that if you started out there in my hat and coat, the—er—trouble would center around you and give me a chance to get away, Riley, but I think we'll call it off," said he. "This is my mess and I'm not going to see anybody else killed in my place or—"

"What's this job worth?" the fighter asked placidly.

"Five hundred, at least!" Hammond contributed.

"A thousand, cash in advance, if you want to tackle it," Jimmy Darton supplemented, "but I think you'd better forget it."

"Have you it with you, this thousand?" the fighter continued.

"Er—yes."

"Hand it to Hammond; it might possibly get tore," smiled Mr. Riley. "Where's the coat and hat, boss?"

Tommy Morely slapped the brave man's back.

"Bully for you!" he cried. "Now, if we're going to do it, let's do it right. You show your face out there first, Jim, with the hat and coat on you. Just give them a chance to recognize you and then duck back. Here you are—go to it! Hammond can go along and drag you back. There!"

He thrust the hat upon Darton and turned up the collar of his coat. Silently Jimmy followed his bodyguard through the next office and the next and the one after that. Sibyl Dane looked fearfully at calm Mr. Riley.

"Can you—can you really do it without being much hurt?" she breathed.

"Me, lady?" said the fighter, and beamed his candid admiration. "Well, lady, I ain't the guy to throw no flower-stands at m'self; but I wanter tell you that when I get done wading into that bunch o' hicks out there, half the ambulances in New York'll be killin' children in the streets t' get here fast enough. Only *I* won't be riding in any of 'em; *I'll* walk! Get me, lady?"

"I get you," Sibyl Dane said faintly. "I—I do so hope you're right."

Through the opened doorways came a momentary roar and then Hammond's voice:

"No, boss! You can't get out!"

Then the door slammed, and Jimmy Barton and his bodyguard were trotting back quickly to the inner office, while Riley, having discarded coat and vest, stepped forward to take the longer coat and the gray hat.

"Now, one o' youse wants to make a quick break outen this side door—get me?" he said. "Duck right around into the main hall and wave your arms and holler, 'He's going out the front way!' or something like that, t' give the ginks in the hall the idee the boss is leaving by the front door. And don't start nothing till you hear me yell. Well—thanks for the thousand, boss; it's a shame t' take it. I guess you're out one coat, too," grinned Mr. Riley, waving a careless hand. "So long!"

He lounged away through the offices, with Hammond at his heels; while they were still in sight Mr. Hammond removed his coat and hat and laid them on a desk, tucking up his sleeves as he moved toward the farther door.

"I'll dash out there and raise the false alarm," said Thomas Morely. "That'll be safe enough, because I can go down by one of the regular elevators while the fun's going on. I—"

He stopped short. In the outer room a hum had risen; they caught several shouts of, "That's him! That's him!" They caught, too, the sound of a surging and of an impact, and a roar from Mr. Hammond and from Riley's harsh throat a blood-curdling yell! And Thomas Morely was gone, and in the side hall they heard:

"He's trying to get out the front! He's trying to get away! Hey!"

After that feet pounded suddenly, dozens of feet whose pounding was accompanied by another, smaller tumult of voices. In the side corridor it became strangely still.

Jimmy Darton turned to his lady love with rather pale lips.

"I hate to think of what's happening to Riley," said he, "but he seemed pretty sure of getting out alive. If we're going, we'd better go now, Sibyl."

Even in the excitement he could not but admire her nerve and her resourcefulness. She noted that Jimmy was without hat or coat, and with no hesitation at all she thrust the hat and coat of faithful Thomas Morely upon him as he drew her to the door.

He gripped them and peered out, rather wild of eye; he found the corridor empty, although the sounds which came from the main hallway chilled him. There was not only shouting in that direction; there was scuffling and the thump of falling bodies and the thudding of fists!

The chairman of the American Committee, holding his breath and declining to look up the side corridor, dragged Sibyl Dane bodily to the bronze door of the last side elevator and pounded thrice; and without a creak the door slid back and—slid forward again as they entered the car; and they were safe!

Or safe for the moment at least, Jimmy Darton amended as they slipped past the thirtieth floor and he drew breath again. There might be any quantity of people downstairs who would recognize him; again, there might not.

Stepping suddenly into the damp emptiness of the coming trust company's establishment, he breathed once more and steered toward the street door; only a stolid old cabinetmaker, polishing at one of the new rails, was there even to glance at them.

Yes, and out by the curb stood the taxicab, quite as Tommy Morely—was he alive now?—had planned. The driver, glancing up keenly from his paper, snatched open the door at the sight of them and set his motor to humming; Jimmy Darton, late chairman of a committee that had never existed, assisted Sibyl Dane into the vehicle and took one last look at that portion of New York.

And in something less than one second he regretted even that pause, for up at the Broadway corner two other taxis were passing—two taxis, each with a man in it who gazed about eagerly—each with a man who saw Jimmy Darton and, seeing

him, reached out and tapped at his driver's arm and pointed down the side street!

An instant the recent chairman fancied that his fevered imagination was playing him tricks; a second glance, however, convinced him that he had seen aright. Both cabs were coming down that way and—

"Got your orders?" he barked at the driver.

"Steamship pier?"

"Yep! Quick! We're chased!" said Darton as he dashed into the cab.

After that, for two minutes or more, James Darton quite lost track of things.

He knew that Sibyl was clutching him hard and stifling one small scream after another; he knew also that Thomas Morely had selected New York's premier daredevil taxicab artist — the gentleman, he fancied, must have gained his training as getaway engineer of some particularly reckless crew of automobile bandits.

Twice in one block they had skimmed so narrowly by a truck that the wheels grated together without locking—ah, and that messenger boy had been snatched aside by the hand of Providence, had he not?

And looking backward Jimmy Darton discovered that two other taxicabs were making much the same sort of progress. They were chased, fast enough!

Still pier sheds and funnels and masts were just ahead, and that was the waterfront. Rather befuddled as to location for the moment, it still seemed to Darton that the Rio boat sailed from this immediate section—and in that he was right, for their chauffeur was heading directly across to the nearest of them and—

"That's where we're going; I know the place now," Jimmy said. "We can't get through with the cab, because those two trucks are blocking the way, Sibyl, but you and I can make a run for it afoot, and once we're aboard I think it'll be all right. I don't know just what's coming behind us—avengers, probably, or maybe some one with a warrant on some cooked-up charge—but whatever it is, now that I've got you, I can fight 'em off with bare fists till seven o'clock, when the boat sails."

"But, Jimmy, if—"

"Are you ready, dear?" Darton asked desperately. "All right; he's stopping now! Quick, out here!"

Brain seething, he dragged her out of the taxi and through the doorway of the pier, utterly ignoring a uniformed person who requested them to halt. Laughing quite wildly, they ran on through the shadows, between boxes and bales, worming their way through alleys of cases and barrels, for well ahead was a square of light and through it came a glimpse of the steamer's side and some yards of gang-plank!

A mountain of cement bags halted them for seconds; they raced around the farther side at last and forward again—and halted once more as a giant hand-truck blocked their passage and their view.

But now the hand-truck, too, had moved along and their way was clear, with the gang-plank and safety not more than twenty feet away; and here Jimmy Darton and his bride-to-be stopped short, because at the foot of the gang-plank, mopping their respective brows as they panted queries at an officer of the steamer—who shook his head firmly—stood two gentlemen.

One of them, the first amazed glance told Jimmy Darton, was none other than Stockwall Westling himself, multi-millionaire maker of motion pictures; the other, rather shorter, was mostly bald and very worried of appearance, with the strained expression of the tired business man; and him, too, Jimmy Darton had recognized even before Sibyl's cry of:

"Father!"

The Dane of Bostwick & Dane wagged his head and stared at her with fishy, exhausted eyes.

"Why the—why didn't you go down the foot—footwalk on the other side of the pier?" he gasped. "It's quite clear over there." He swayed toward his only daughter. "What are you—up to?"

"Pardon me, sir, but — if you don't

mind?—let me have a word with Mr. Darton first?" Westling put in breathlessly. "If he means to sail on this boat—but I'm not going to let you sail!"

"You may have nothing to say about it!" Jimmy corrected.

"And again, I may have much to say about it," the big man insisted, with astonishing suavity. "Just be calm for a moment, Mr. Darton. Please! Is it true, as I have been informed, that you have abandoned your—er—American Committee?"

"It is—quite true," the founder confessed.

"Is it true that—er—a certain rich man was and is behind the move?"

Jimmy Darton crossed his fingers and braced himself.

"I'm not coming back here for years; I may as well tell the truth," said he. "There never was anybody behind it except myself, Mr. Westling."

"Well, by gad! I thought as much! Yes, and I said so! I knew it from the very beginning and — have you really abandoned it for good?"

"I really have."

Westling laid a hand on his arm and searched Jimmy Darton's amazed countenance.

"Tell me one thing more, young man," he said tensely. "Was it all—*all* your own idea?"

Jimmy Darton nodded without great enthusiasm. It chanced that just then he was thinking of the tidy little home that could have been built with the cold cash his American Committee had wasted. Stockwall Westling, on the other hand, heaved a vast sigh of obvious pleasure.

"You're not going to sail on this boat, Mr. Darton," said he, rather cryptically. "Because I've spent nearly two million dollars trying to find a man with a really original mind and I haven't found him yet. You're going to lie low for a few days, until I can calm the storm you've raised—and I have influence enough in the business to do that, as you probably know.

"I will promise you that the whole affair shall be hushed, and that nobody shall lose his position because he was carried away by your idea. You may rely on that, Mr. Darton, because we settled as much in conference before a hint came that you had quit. But as for yourself, you're coming with us!" Westling concluded, implacably. "We'll give you twelve thousand for the first year, and more as you're worth it, and a small royalty on the stuff you turn out. *But you're coming, for that idea was originality itself!*"

It might have been expected that Jimmy Darton would have been quite overwhelmed; that he would have staggered back and mouthed incoherently—or perhaps that he would have embraced Mr. Westling.

Instead, drawing the dumfounded Sibyl closer to him, he merely transfixed Sibyl's father with an inquiring, triumphant, challenging eye.

"Well?" Jimmy Darton asked pointedly.

The wicked, vanquished father, who may not have been so very wicked, after all, but whose only daughter's eye was even then accusing him for the too elaborate aid of his partner, mopped his brow for the last time, and resignedly replaced his hat.

"I never dreamed of making a thousand a month at your age, no—if that's what you mean, Jimmy," he said, rather weakly. "Don't elope."

So it happened late that evening that a certain purser out on the heaving Atlantic wondered just what had happened to the man who engaged A4 on the promenade deck and never came to claim it. He had no means of knowing that the very man, registered as "Joseph Perrine, Toledo, Ohio," for safety sake, was sitting even then in the spacious bedroom on the tenth floor Broadway corner of a vast New York hotel, smoking a superb cigar, gazing at the ceiling, dreaming, while Thomas Morely huddled down in an armchair, supped black coffee and nibbled at a sandwich he was really too tired to eat.

There could be no two opinions about Thomas's condition; he was weary to the dropping point, but he was still a friend. Peevish and dragged out to the very limit was Thomas, but still a friend—for:

"Well, there's some of your clothes, anyway, and nobody saw me coming here; you'll have to buy new shirts and collars and the other stuff," he droned on. "I told 'em that you'd left the city for two weeks; Westling said it would be safe enough for you to appear in public by that time, if not before. To-morrow, if I'm still alive, I'll see how much the people will allow on that furniture, Jimmy, and the thousand dollar check for the refunded rent I gave you, didn't I?"

"Eh? Yes—yes," murmured the ex-chairman.

"So instead of being dead and macerated, you're only two or three thousand dollars out at the worst of it," the artist grumbled. "Gad! What a cold I got going home without that overcoat! . . . Say, there was hardly a bruise on Riley, Jim! He must have completely wrecked a dozen of 'em, too! . . . The American Committee! Kind Heaven above! the American Committee!"

"I won!" said Jimmy Darton, from his rosy dream. "I won!"

"Huh?" snarled his best friend. "Won what? If there ever was a ghastly, crazy, nightmare fizzle in this world it—"

Here Jimmy Darton sat up suddenly and scowled wonderingly, and then smiled beatifically.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"The American Committee, of course. It—"

"Well, I'm talking about Sibyl!" Jimmy Darton purred, as he settled back again. "Sibyl, my boy! Just about—Sibyl!"

THE END.

Cochrane Hands Out a Lemon

by Frank A. Russell

"COME hither, my gentle Bunny. I would impart somewhat."

"Cut out the Shakespeare stuff, Jim. I'm not in a 'coming hither' mood. Spill it from where you are, or let it slide. 'Twon't make much difference, I guess."

Bunny Harding and James Cochrane were at the end of their first season's farming, on the land they had bought with the proceeds of Jim's stunt in Sydney. By a slick bit of work he made a leading firm of jewelers come across with ten thousand dollars, in settlement of a threatened action where they had all the equities and Jim all the law.

The outcome of their farming experi-

ment could be deduced from the tempers of the two men on this black day, when the seriousness of their financial status had been driven home to them by the stoppage of their credit in many directions.

"A little peeved, Bunny? Well, I've given our position a careful study and I think I have found a remedy."

"A remedy? What on earth can save us, you poor simp?"

"We could sell this place, and start in another line," was the reply.

Bunny greeted the suggestion with a scornful laugh.

"Why, so we could," he rejoined with biting sarcasm, "and get a bonus per head for the rabbits, I suppose. This country has gone to your brain, Jim. You can't stand prosperity."

You will notice that friend Bunny had developed somewhat from the callow youth who had landed in Australia a few months before, a shining mark for all the "con" men within a radius of a hundred miles.

"My idea is to sell it for about twenty-five thousand dollars, and even then have to be begged to part with it," was the unruffled response of the senior partner, a past master in the gentle art of "putting one over."

"Now then, Jim, you're at your old tricks, after our agreement to run straight," Bunny commented severely.

"You've got me dead wrong, Bunny; you are jumping at conclusions, in spite of the warning in the dear old song:

> "'Do not jump at your conclusions,
> Turn things over, and you find
> That shirt-fronts are delusions;
> They are dickeys tied behind.'"

"Aw, quit fooling, and let us get down to business. Anything that will get us out of here, even at a loss, I'm in on, so long as it isn't against the law."

"Let me refresh your memory then. Perhaps the mention of our wrongs will arouse even you, oh law-abiding Bunny, and drive you to desperate measures.

"We paid our ten thousand bucks," Cochrane continued, "to that old confidence man Sandy McKechnie, and gave him a mortgage for the balance. For that we got this waterless, rabbit-infested hunk of dirt he called a farm. We were babies in his hands, and he got away with it. Now I propose to sell this place back to him, but for more than double what we paid him. See?"

"You big boob! Now I know you're crazy. I'm going out to kill a rabbit for dinner," was all the reply the disappointed and disgusted Bunny would give.

"Here, let that rabbit wait. I tell you it can be done," insisted Cochrane.

"Like Hades, it can—not," retorted the disgusted Bunny. "How?"

"Do you know what psychology is?" Cochrane asked.

"Thank God, I always knew enough to steer clear of anything ending in 'ology,'" was Bunny's simple answer.

"Well, I'll tell you. It's the method universally used by the knowing to hand a lemon to a thieving Scotchman, so that he'll mistake it for an orange."

"If that's so, I'm strong for it, and I'll say this, Jim, that if high-browism teaches a guy how to sell a bum place like this, it ought to be made compulsory in all the schools."

"I'm going to steer myself up against Mac's roll just like that chap who used to rob the rich to help the poor—Robin Hood."

"Well, Jim, I guess you've got this doped out to rights. Go ahead, and give me my lines."

"To start with, that discovery of oil over at Grafton has got all these Reubs dizzy, hasn't it? They know as much about oil lands as you do about Biblical history, and every last one of them is figuring out that if oil has been found thirty miles off, it's a good bet that it will turn up here. Is that right?"

"Go on, I'm not contradictin' you."

"The fools think they're going to find it in cans, labeled 'Best Standard.' What was old man Cooper snooping about for when we lamped him yesterday? If he happened to find a greasy spot on a sheep,

he'd think his middle name was Rockefeller."

"Still, you can't sell a lemon like this just because you happen to be surrounded by simps. They're the old original tightwads when it comes to loosening up, and that pirate McKechnie is the worst.

"Besides," Bunny continued, "you can't get away with false pretenses like that. All Australia wouldn't be big enough to hide in. When you take away the roll of a Scotchman, it isn't a case of watchful waiting, but war right off the bat."

"Ain't you the cheerful home companion, all right? Go on, knock till you feel it's done you some good, and then, perhaps you'll listen to your Uncle Jim. I'm not going to mention oil, and I give you my word I'm not even going to deceive the old Scotchman. But I'm going to let him deceive himself, and that's just where psychology is going to get in its strong work. Now listen, for your job in this is man-sized, and you have to remember all the acting stunts you learned in the lurid past."

The two friends thereupon went into executive session, and two hours afterwards, the mine was laid, the snare was set, the hook was baited, or—well, you can choose your metaphor to suit yourself, so long as the sense of it is that Sandy McKechnie was to be torpedoed without warning.

In one of their spasmodic attempts to better the water-supply of the farm, Jim and Bunny had hired a boring plant, including a wheezy little gas engine, and had made a few ill-informed, desultory stabs to locate the artesian water that lay at an unascertained depth beneath most of that part of the country.

On the day after their council of war they wended their usual way to the site of the last attempt, and proceeded to set the engine going.

Work did not last long, however, for Jim, while carrying two carboys of oil from the ramshackle shed that served as shelter for the few stores necessary for carrying on the work, stumbled on some rusty lengths of piping and went sprawling, the oil liberally baptizing him. More of it went over the immediate vicinity of the bore hole, which for about eight feet in height was enclosed with some rough shingling and saplings that served as supports for part of the apparatus.

A few minutes afterwards they retraced their steps down the hill and into the dusty township of Yarran.

II.

An Australian bush township has two centres of social activity, the post-office and the local saloon, in bush parlance a "pub."

The postmaster, who combines that governmental post with the less ornamental one of storeman, or baker, or what not, has two duties that rather conflict.

One is to conserve the interests of the government and preserve the sanctity of the mails, the other to carry out the onerous task assigned to him by Fate, in virtue of his position, and act as the conduit pipe of all the news that filters through to him by so many channels.

If a telephone call for Corrumgobilly—four rings, two short and two long—comes through the post-office, which is also the telephone exchange, it soon becomes a matter of common knowledge that Sam Evans has been offered four shillings for his wheat, or that Mrs. Beeby's daughter in the city has had twins.

All this is important, in view of what happened, and James Attwood Cochrane counted on it in his plans. Also it is useful information.

The pub is the disseminator of the news supplied by the post-office. To the pub, therefore, our two adventurers wandered.

In the wooden building, roofed with galvanized iron, Alexander McKechnie, land and commission agent, had his office, but he had found by long experience that more business was to be picked up in the bar than was to be garnered in a hot six by eight.

In the bar, moreover, could be procured, at a moment's notice, those remedies for

heat ailments, to which the elderly Scotchman is so peculiarly liable.

And, true to form and type, the venerable one was standing at the bar, grasping a liquid preventive of heat strokes, and surrounded by a knot of farmers, who were listening appreciatively to an account the old scoundrel was giving of the manner in which he had made the fortune of a perfect stranger, by recommending the purchase of a certain farm in the oil belt.

The moral to be drawn, "Go thou and do likewise," was being driven home by Sandy when Jim and Bunny made their appearance on the veranda, where they stopped to speak to an acquaintance.

Sandy changed the subject when he heard the voices of the new-comers.

"Ah'll be juist frae Grafton the mor-r-n," he remarked, "an' the crood o' specilators an' propooters wes past belief. Ay! tes a graund thong for the deestreect, a' the fowk comin' to buy the likely spots, forbye their spendin' so muckle siller i' the toon. An' 'tes ma joogement that oor bit toonship here is juist as fine a spot as Grafton. Doone, ma mannie, ye cudna dae better than pairchaise the bit place ye was speirin' aboot th' ither day."

He launched out into a tangle of reasons why that property should be just the kind to contain the oil, the discovery of which was filling everybody in the district with the insanity of speculation.

In the midst of his harangue, Jim and Bunny entered, with an air of excitement which they seemingly tried hard to quell.

"Howdy, folks! Name it!" cried Cochrane boisterously. "These are all on me."

The crowd eyed him curiously, for as he drank his whisky his hand shook and some of the liquor was wasted.

The Scotchman who can witness sacrilege committed like this is not yet born, and McKechnie gazed at Jim with a world of wonderment in his eyes, for the American's ordinary manner, though friendly to these Australians among whom his lot had been cast, had never been remarkable for effusion, but it came close to that now.

"Whut ails ye, Maister Cochrane, are ye no weel the day?" Sandy asked.

"Well? I should say I was well. I'm celebrating. That's all the matter with with me. Come on, boys, have a repeater. When good luck comes my way—"

He stopped short, and the warning kick that Bunny administered was just too late to escape the attention of Mr. McKechnie.

"Well, what's the good word?" one of the loungers inquired. "Birthday party?"

Cochrane's sheepish look was his only reply, for Bunny shot a frown at him, with a slight headshake, which also was unfortunately intercepted by the sharp eyes of Sandy.

Jim hastily called for another round of drinks, and resented loudly the advice tendered him by his friend, not to overdo it. He fairly swore at Bunny, and invited him to mind his own business.

"If you are boarding the water-wagon, all right, go to it, my son. Climb aboard. But not for me. No water in mine. No, sirree! Oil and water won't mix!"

He gave a noisy laugh at his own jest, and with a whispered rebuke that the others did not catch, Bunny seized his arm and fairly hustled him to the side door of the barroom.

"Any one in the back parlor, Joe?" he asked at the door. "All right."

There was a momentary pause when they left the room. Then babel broke out.

"Whaddya make out o' that?"

"Notice his clo'se? All oil, by cripes."

"They've struck it all right."

"The lucky cows, and them on the worst section in the distric'."

"Listen at them. They'll be fightin' next." And, indeed, the voices of the two could be heard from the parlor.

Sandy said nothing, and unobtrusively left the room by the side door. Curiosity is a painful and ugly trait.

Cochrane's voice was loud, and his friend could be plainly heard trying to silence him.

"I say, sell out, while we can get a fair return on our money," Jim shouted, his voice roughened by drink. "Any of those

syndicates over at Grafton would buy for a good price. If we can get thirty thousand dollars, let some one else make a bit, I say."

"You lunkhead!" shrilled Bunny, his temper clearly getting the better of his discretion, "you wouldn't talk like that if you wern't lit up like a Fourth o' July. Let's work the thing a bit, and then get the capital, but hold a big slice ourselves. My idea is to keep quiet a while, and get options on all the adjoining properties. This has to be worked big."

"Bunny, you make me tired. If we work it ourselves, we'll be trimmed good and proper. These promoters will take our hide and hair. Where in Sam Hill is the sense of hanging on for years, when you could get a good price and quit? What do we know about the business? I tell you it takes big capital to swing a thing like this. It's my property, and I won't let you gamble with it. If I get an offer that is good enough, I'll rush it."

"Cut out that line of talk, Jim Cochrane. You owe me money, and if the place is in your name, I'm half partner. You double-cross me, and I'll soon show you what my rights are. You're stewed, or you wouldn't talk like this.

"While you owe me money you can't sell that property, I'd have you know," Bunny went on. "Now, I'm off to Grafton with the plans to-night, and I think I can get some of the Standard Oil people that are over there to make a bid, and away over the price you think you can get. I'll wire you to-morrow, and if I don't succeed you can have a try, but do nothing till then. Does that go?"

"Aw, I suppose so. You're getting more reasonable now. Get a price, that's all, I say. Don't monkey round with corporations." Cochrane was growing sulky. "And, see here, Bunny, you throw that money I owe you into my face too often. Look out I don't pay you off and dissolve partnership. You're asking for it."

"You won't do that, when you get over your peeve, Jim. Come on, I'm off. There's lot's to do before I can get away."

"I'm not stopping you. I'm staying here a while. You don't want me to kiss you good-by, I suppose."

"No, I don't," snapped Bunny. "I've got work to do, and I'm naturally bilious, anyway."

Sandy slipped back into the bar as Bunny came out and entered the street.

The excited speculations of the bar loungers were still in full swing. It must be remembered that the Grafton strike was the first evidence of oil in the country, where the ignorance of conditions and indications was colossal.

But over the whole community there had burst a wave of sudden prosperity, and even in townships not directly affected by the boom, its influence was felt. The rosy fingers of Hope beckoned many to plunge into the syndicates and corporations that sprang up like mushrooms.

The advent of spray from this giant wave in the township of Yarran is understandable, therefore.

Cochrane entered the bar and beckoned to Sandy, who followed him to the parlor.

Jim's thoughts and Sandy's were widely different.

Sandy thought: "If I can get some proof of this oil strike, I'll buy the place before Harding gets back, and put it off to a syndicate that will give me a hundred per cent profit."

Jim thought: "He's nosing round the hook. Here's where I do the grand Annette Kellermann dive, and fasten it in the old scoundrel's gills."

In the back parlor, with many a lurch and stumble, and clutching fast to Sandy's coat, Jim put up an appeal for a loan.

"Bunny an' I have had a li'l' diffunce, Mr. McKechnie, an' I'm going to teach him a less'n. I want you sh'd len' me a thousan' poun'—"

"Ye'll no be expectin' me tae len' ye th' amoont, Maister—" Sandy began when with drunken dignity Jim interrupted.

"Sorry I mentioned it. Lemme tell you you've lost a big opportun'ty. I know somep'n you would pay money t' hear, but I'll keep 't t' myself. Good day, sir."

"Ye'll no be affrontit be onything Ah've said, Maister Cochrane. Ye ken Ah hev ta see whit wey Ah can obligate ye. Ah'll be oop tae see ye th' mor-r-n, an' mebbe Ah'll hae the bit siller ye need, an' we'll talk a whee ower yin or twa maitters that'll intrest ye."

He patted the sullen shoulder of Cochrane into amiability, as he guided him towards the street and sped him on his uncertain way.

As he walked back to the shady pub, he smelt his fingers curiously, and the sniffing made him smile, as he softly rubbed his oily digits together.

"I bet the old fox will be around the place to-night looking for evidences of oil. And I'd put over another bet that he won't know what to look for. He must have a clear coast. Bunny is some little actor. When he sends his telegram there will be something doing, if Sandy has checked me up properly, and trust the old dog for that."

Jim, well satisfied, smiled to himself.

Jim's somewhat reckless career, if it had been productive of no other benefit, had provided him with a good working knowledge of what would be the likely mental processes of a not too scrupulous individual who was trying to take an advantage of a fellow-being.

He deduced, with a fair amount of certitude, that Sandy's first move would be to do a little first aid work, and satisfy himself that he was building a sure foundation. He would therefore take the earliest opportunity of trying to examine the bore that was in progress, which naturally was the site of the strike, if strike there had been.

And here, be it remarked, the crook, or potential crook, lays open his defenses wide. There is no member of society who is victimized so often as the confidence man, using that term to describe every kind of rascal, from the poor of the species up to the millionaire.

Each one will, if circumstances are unpropitious, fall for the graft of a different sort from his own.

Sandy, Jim therefore felt sure, would be so full of admiration for his own cleverness at smelling a rat, and successfully eavesdropping, when the others around him were still wondering what was happening, that it would be unlikely he would exercise his ordinary business acumen. The wish would be father to the thought of success, especially as his only idea would be to make a quick profit through the organization of a syndicate among his neighbors who were ripe for plucking.

That night, then, Jim again made his way to the pub, and with noisy friendliness greeted the mixed crowd that thronged the place.

With every fresh round he seemed to be on the point of revealing a secret, but questioning only caused an excess of sudden caution, and he would cover his momentary confusion by calling for the barman "to set 'em up again."

His eye was on the old Scotchman, who, after half an hour, when it seemed that Jim was anchored for the night, slipped out of the bar.

A few minutes after, Jim laughingly excused himself, promising to be back later.

It was a brilliant moonlight evening, and the long lean figure of Sandy McKechnie could be plainly discerned making his slow way up the hill that led to the homestead of the Americans.

With a low laugh of appreciation of his own powers of discernment, Jim proceeded to follow at a distance.

Sandy proceeded to the bore already described, and with infinite care clambered amongst the machinery, and behind the shed.

After a few minutes he emerged, and then Jim hurried back to the bar, where Sandy found him when he entered later.

The old man was plainly excited, and there was a sparkle in his eye that pleased Mr. James Cochrane.

III.

Next morning, bright and early, the sole Australian representative of the Clan McKechnie called on Jim.

"Ah've bin thinkin' aboot the loan ye wes speirin', Maister Cochrane, an' ma mind misgeeves me that ye hae ower muckle on the place the noo. Times is na whut they wes, an' ye hevna made ower muckle o' the natural resoorces o' the land."

"You've got that dead to rights, Mr. McKechnie, but rabbits don't fetch what they used to, the trappers tell me, so we're handicapped. As to the loan, that can wait. I was irritated yesterday, and had it in mind to play it pretty low down on my partner. I feel better now."

"Gin ye canna make a guid leevin' off the fairm, whit wey di ye no sell it, Maister Cochrane? Ah cudna say for sure, but Ah've nae doot Ah cud get ye whut ye paid."

It was the opening gambit of the negotiations, and Jim braced himself for the fray.

He laughed good-naturedly.

"You wouldn't make such a bad bargain at that, if you only knew. You see, as a rabbit breeder, I am a failure, owing to the distance from the market, but we have just found out a little something that gives us an idea that we've been unjust to this property, and to you, Mr. McKechnie."

"An' whut may be the new development, gin Ah may speir?"

"Well, you'll know all in good time. It needs capital and time, but this place we despised is going to surprise you all here."

"Ah ken you're richt; it needs proper work an' on a large scale, an' it would be worth a lot o' siller. That's why Ah'm offerin' to buy it, for ye ken ma ither property rins for miles beyont this one."

"We are going to show you some American methods here, Mr. McKechnie. Not but what I wouldn't be willing to sell for a fair profit, but my partner sees a fortune in the place, worked according to our new plans, and though I don't agree, he's bound to have his way."

"Weel, Ah wudna say Ah wud stop at a hoonder pouns or so, for Ah hev ma own ideas that the land is a' richt, i' the proper hands, but ye'll juist think it over. Mebbe, Ah wull be alang i' th' efternune. Guidbye, Maister Cochrane."

"So-long."

The cautious Sandy wished to let the idea of a sale to him sink into the mind of the American, and he was unwishful to commit himself till he had an opportunity to get a line on the outcome of Bunny's visit to the promoters at Grafton.

He had a good idea simmering in his head whereby he might get advance information from his friend the postmaster as to the contents of the telegram.

If no business resulted at Grafton, he could take his time and get the place on option perhaps, which would give him an opportunity to test the feeling in the district, and gamble with the proposition in the form of a syndicate, without the risk of a penny.

If, on the other hand, there was the prospect of the Grafton people coming across, he had a good chance of appealing to the avarice of Cochrane, and also to the ugly spirit he had witnessed the day before. It was a matter of price, or he might even be lucky enough to get Jim, who was the real owner, to give him an option for a small sum, which would cut off the promoters from Grafton, who would be forced by these means to deal with him.

In these pleasant dreams of getting something for nothing he passed the warm intervening hours, putting in frequent appearances at the post-office, where the gossip about the Americans was rifest.

From a coign of vantage he saw Jim call twice at the office, presumably to inquire for the expected telegram, and walk away unsatisfied.

"Seems pretty excited about a wire he's expectin'," explained the postmaster. "Nothing through yet. Told him I'd send it up to him soon's it comes. About this oil strike, likely? Some men has all the luck."

Sandy went over to his office for a few minutes while he waited for information, and saw Jim in earnest conversation with a farmer, a very wealthy one, too.

He heard only one sentence of their talk, as they parted, the farmer to his gig and Jim to his home, but that sentence made him think.

"I might consider four thousand; I'll let you know. I'm waiting to hear from my partner."

Evidently he was not to be the only bidder. Fool to think a thing like that would not get about.

About two o'clock he was at the post-office again, and heard the expression of amazement, ill suppressed by the official, as he "took" a wire.

He was soon in possession of all the information he wanted.

Everything O. K. Big price. Wire consent. HARDING.

"This ought to suit Cochrane," said the postmaster, as he wrote out the message. "To think that old warren of yours should turn out like this, Mac. You needn't have smiled like you did when you worked it off on them two new chums."

"Maister Cochrane wull want that telegram, Lawson, an' if ye'll juist pit it in a bit envelope, Ah wull tak' it til him maeself."

With excitement which he drove from his looks with all the force of will that he possessed, Sandy hastened up to the homestead, only waiting to tell his nephew, who was clerk and office-boy, to bring after him a couple of blank transfers of land, and the telegram.

"Maister Cochrane," he announced, "Ah'm actin' for a syndicate that is wantin' tae pairchase a' the land frae the railway doon tae ma property near the river. This land o' yours is includit. Ah'm empowered to offer ye three thousan' sovereigns for it."

"Let's get that in American—fifteen thousand dollars. No, siree!" and Jim smiled.

"Wull ye gie me an option ower the place for say, one month, at an advance o' five hoonderd?"

"Nothing doing, Mr. McKechnie."

"Whut's yer poseetion, then? Ye telt me the mor-r-n that ye wantit to sell, gin ye got yer price. Whut is yer price?"

"Why, I can get four thousand without going outside the district, Mr. McKechnie," was the reply, "but I'm waiting for a telegram from my partner, which will tell me where I stand."

"Ah'm dealin' wi' you, an' no wi' yer pairtner," cried Sandy. "Ye knaw yer own business best, o' course, but ye telt me ye owed him a thousan' pouns, an' gin ye cud get that and pay him off, the hept of the siller wud be yer ain, isna that so?"

"By jiminy!" whispered Jim to himself, and fidgeted.

Sandy saw his advantage and pushed it.

"If ye depend on workin' the land, how lang wud it be fore ye made so muckle siller? Wud Maister Harding think o' onybody but himsel' gin he was i' your place? Ye own the fairm, an' 'tis yer ain to dispose of as ye like."

Jim spoke up at last.

"Four thousand pounds is no good to me, Mr. McKechnie. Five thousand might tempt me, though it seems pretty raw to treat Bunny like this.

"But what do you want with the property, that you offer so much money? You can't know what we know, and without that knowledge the place is only a scrubby little lump of dirt. What's the game? By jiminy, you must know something about an oil strike, is that it?"

"Ah'm no at leeberty to tell ye whut ma clients want it for, but ye maun ta' ma offer the noo, or leave it."

Jim was in a great quandary, as Sandy could see. He walked about the room nervously, with knit brows, trying to make up his mind.

"Let me alone a while. This is a great temptation to me, Mr. McKechnie. I know I'm legally within my rights to sell, but, on the other hand, I may be robbing my partner of a big fortune. Then there's the time it takes to fix up the deal.

"He'll fight like a tiger to stop the sale, and yet I can't see how it can be rushed through. You would only pay a deposit, and he would get an injunction against

your paying the balance, and I would be tied up."

"If ye'll say the word, an' close the deal, Ah wull pay ye the cash richt awa', for don't Ah know the title is a' richt. We can send the certificates an' transfer doon tae Sydney, wi' the dischairge mortgage, an' ye needna tell him aboot it till it is too late for him tae cause ye trouble."

It was the voice of the tempter, for indeed the transfer of land in Australia is very safe and easy.

"It may be giving up a fortune," Jim muttered, and the eyes of Sandy McKechnie sparkled.

"Then we'll ca' it a bargain at five thousand, an' the money doon," he suggested, craftily.

"It's raw, but I'll make Bunny understand," Jim murmured as if to himself.

Sandy saw his boy coming and went out to intercept him and give him instructions.

He also saw the train stop, an unusual event for Yarran, which was a flag station. He went back into the house.

James had a pair of glasses, which he leveled at the railway station, half a mile away.

"It's Bunny," he announced excitedly. "Good Lord!"

"Ye hev only to sign here, Maister Cochrane, an' ye can leave the rest tae me."

"The money," gasped Jim, as he took the ready fountain-pen that Sandy extended.

"Here ye are, a' guid notes o' the Commonwealth Bank. Ah got the bank here tae hev them a' ready, against ye consentin' to sell," explained Sandy, who had feared that his check would not be accepted by one who had already been victimized by him.

"A telegram for Mr. Cochrane. I forgot to give it to him," said the sheepish nephew, entering the room. These were part of his instructions.

James gave an exclamation of astonishment, which Sandy affected not to hear.

"Mr. McKechnie, I want to say right here in your clerk's presence that you have paid too much for this property, and if you're willing to tear up that transfer, I'll give you back your money. You hear me, boy?" turning to the youth, who nodded.

"Ah think Ah've no reason tae be worried," quoth Sandy. "Ah, mon, ye canna tak' an old fox in that gait. Ah'll juist be keepin' ma bargain, thankin' ye kindly, a' the same."

"It is a bad bargain, and I've been wondering what you intended doing with the place to make it worth all that to your syndicate, but I don't want to take advantage of any wrong ideas you may have. Will you cancel the sale even now? Mr. Harding is coming up the path."

"Noo, Ah will no concel ony sale. The place is mine, an' Ah'm no complainin'," roared Sandy, who knew well what inspired this honest dealing, the telegram dangling still from Jim's fingers.

Bunny made his entrance at this moment.

"Howdy, people," he exclaimed. "All right, Jim."

"Yes, Bunny, I've sold the farm."

"How much?" nonchalantly.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Good business. Did you get my wire?"

"Just this minute. I see it arrived at 1.30. I'll have to warm Lawson up."

"So you settled it."

"You betcha, pending your consent. Big price, but a beauty. We'll coin money in the inter-island trade, now that there are so few boats available. Glad you sold here. Who's the buyer?"

"Here he stands. Mr. McKechnie. And he's a trump. Oh, Bunny, we've got to take back everything we said against him. The price he charged us for this place was really low. It was us who didn't know enough to manage it. McKechnie was explaining it to me. It appears that if you work it with big capital, and can afford to go after it in a big way, as he is going to do, the farm will coin money. He has a syndicate.

"I thought he was too optimistic, for

he kept offering me big money, and I even had the nerve to try to get him to take his money back, but he got quite sore over it. The boy here will bear me out."

Bunny was smiling and nodding during Jim's story, and turned an appreciative gaze on Sandy.

He put out his hand.

"I owe you an apology, sir," he said handsomely. "I wronged you in my thoughts. I understood you meant to sting us when you wished this farm on us. I see I was wrong. What's the idea? We once thought that if we erected a freezing plant and did our own freezing on the land we could maybe make a fortune out of frozen rabbits. Maybe that's your idea. Jim," he said with regret, "perhaps we dropped that scheme too quick."

McKechnie was for the first time showing doubts.

"Ah'm intendin' tae work the land for the oil that's here," he announced, to show them he was wise to their game.

They met him with blank looks.

"Oil?" echoed Jim. "Bunny, we've been stung. How did you know there's oil?" he asked, and Sandy grinned.

"Ye needna keep it oop," he warned them. "Ah saw the bit bore ye pit doon, wi' a' the guid oil aboot. An', Ah knew Maister Bunny was guan tae Grafton tae thae Rockefeller fowk, an' forbye, Maister Cochrane was a whee sprung at the pub yestiddy, an' the bit pussy joomped oot o' the sack, whiles his claes wes a' oily juist efter he cam' frae borin'. An' ye may as weel ken," he concluded with a malicious twinkle, "noo that the maitter is a' settled, that Ah saw the telegram frae Maister Bunny, at the posty's, an' pit twa an' twa thegither—"

"And made five thousand of the sum," was Jim's conclusion.

"Well, Mr. McKechnie, you know more than we do. That bore was a water bore, and the oil was spilt through a clumsy tumble I took. Bunny went to Grafton to see an American friend of ours, over here for the Standard Oil people, and Bunny was after him to get a price for a swell little sixty-foot yawl he has for sale. We are going to take advantage of the shortage of shipping, owing to the war, to get our share of inter-island trade. Of course the purchase depended on our sale of this property. It was a letter from him with the splendid suggestion that sent me to celebrating. The wire referred to that."

"Ye canna catch an auld birdie wi' chaff," retorted Sandy. "Ye made false ree-presentations. Ah heerd ye i' the parlor, discussin' th' almichty fortune ye wes guan tae mek oot o' th' land, an' ne'er a word aboot a boat. Whut wes that bonny scheme, if ye didna want me tae thenk it wes oil."

"We made no representations about the property. What you overheard at a private conversation is not a representation. We were probably referring to an alternative scheme of buying sheep, and pitting them against the rabbits, just after our bore struck water at a depth of a hundred and fifty feet. This took away one of the obstacles to a successful working of the farm, and our idea was that if the sheep and rabbits got on well together, we might introduce a hybrid to the trade that might have great value for the combination of fur wool, which would be the resulting product. You get the commercial possibilities of the scheme, don't you, Mr. McKechnie? You might try it. I make you a present of the idea."

Jim smiled pleasantly at the enraged Scot as he concluded his explanation.

"Is it daft ye think Ah am?" he shouted.

"Well," commented Bunny, "some men might think you were to pay such a price for this land, but we are in your confidence, and take your word for the fact that with capital it can be made very productive."

"Ah'll hev the law on ye, if there's ony law in Australia," threatened the irate Sandy, in shrill tones.

"It seems to me," said Bunny severely, "that we are the aggrieved parties. Our private talk listened to, and our correspondence spied on. I'm not sure that it

is not criminal, to violate the sanctity of the mails. So above board was my partner, the soul of honor," and Jim straightened and eyed Sandy with a dignified acceptance to the term, "that your own nephew will testify, if you are so unwise as to impugn the sale, that you were offered a cancellation, and warned that you were offering too high a price."

"It now transpires"—where did Bunny get such elegant language?—"that you were trying to cheat us for the second time. You have succeeded in completely deceiving yourself, Mr. McKechnie, and have allowed your avarice to run away with your discretion."

Oh, the unction in Bunny's voice as he gave vent to these noble words!

"Ye'll see. Ye'll see," cried Sandy. "Ah'm no dune wi' ye yet."

"We must warn you, sir, not to attempt to deal with this property as an oil proposition. We will immediately make it known in Yarran that you bought under a misapprehension."

Sandy shook his fists at them as he saw his last hope taken away from him.

"Ye may rot in hell for this," he snarled viciously.

"Naughty, naughty!" reproved Jim, and he closed the door on the still defiant land and commission agent.

"You wonder!" quoth the admiring Bunny.

"It was too easy," deprecated Jim, "and no law fractured, you will be pleased to note, Mr. Harding. By heck, that yawl idea is not a bad one at that. We have a bit of kale to the good, and we might do worse. A trip will do us both good. I want to get where we will never see a rabbit again."

"We'll leave to-morrow, Jimsy, and, say, that pyschology thing better come along, too. We may need her in the islands."

Saving Two Cents

by Kensett Rossiter

BILLY LINES maintained law-offices in one of the down-town buildings more as a pretense of occupation than for the carrying on of a useful profession. True, he did have charge of his father's estate and an occasional case drifted his way and interfered with his social duties.

Money was no object to Billy; it was adventure that his spirit craved. And, at the time this story begins, the estate consumed very little time in its management; consequently, as there were no other cases on his calendar, the young lawyer was practically care-free.

Billy was tilted back in his swivel-chair with his eyes glued to the ceiling, but don't

for an instant assume he was doing anything quite so prosaic as looking at it. Billy's mind was far removed from the ceiling or yet his law books.

In fancy, he was visiting again a little island off the Maine coast; then he made a long jump to the Canadian Rockies, and in turn drifted back nearer home, where his imaginary vision took in the white-green breakers stretching along the shoreline of the quiet little Long Island resort where he had spent the previous week-end.

Once more he was sitting on the veranda of the hotel, and again he was seeing the girl in white who had then attracted him.

She was a pretty girl, a fascinating type, and her name was Alice E. Smith—he had seen it on the hotel register. She had hurt her arm recently; it was in a sling. That was all he knew about her.

Why was it that her face kept crowding itself into his vision? Suddenly, Billy Lines swung round in his chair. Some way he must meet her; here was an adventure in itself. Billy's mind was made up.

In answer to the buzzer his stenographer appeared in the doorway.

"Anna, please call up the Brite Detective Agency and ask them to send one of their best men up here at once; it's an important case."

Billy chuckled quietly to himself. What had he better tell the detective? He'd better tell him the truth and not try to make a mystery out of it. He just wanted to meet the girl, that's all.

He lit a cigar, reached for a copy of the *Social Register* and was running his finger along the margin of the Smiths when the detective came rushing into his office.

"Something serious, I expect, Mr. Lines?"

"Not very," admitted the lawyer, as he closed the door softly so that his stenographer, at least, might be entitled to assume that a mystery of first rank was being investigated. "The truth is," confided Billy, "I've seen a girl—"

The detective arched his eyebrows; he was prepared for anything.

"A stunning girl, a deucedly pretty one," Billy continued. "All I know is her name—you've probably heard it before—Smith; and she lives in Brooklyn. Oh, yes, she hurt her arm recently; it was in a sling."

"Ump," noted the detective: "Alice E. Smith, you say, and she resides in Brooklyn and hurt her arm. Anything more?"

"No," said Billy, "except I'm very anxious to learn who she is. Do you want any money for current expenses?"

"Oh, fifty dollars will start the case, Mr. Lines. I think we can locate your party all right; we'll keep you informed by telephone. Good-day."

Billy waited impatiently for three whole days. Then he called up the Brite Detective Agency.

"Have you found out anything yet?" he asked.

"No," replied the voice at the other end of the line, "but we've got a clue, and I think we'll be able to give you the information in a very short time. If you don't mind, send another fifty around for expenses."

At the end of the week Billy's patience became exhausted and he called up again.

"Nothing doing yet," advised the detective, "but I think we can make a report Monday. What's that? Oh, thirty-five dollars will be enough this time. Sure, a check will be all right."

When Monday morning came the detective was as good as his word. He walked briskly into the office.

"Well, Mr. Lines," he greeted, "we've located your party at last. Had to send a man personally to every Smith in Brooklyn, and the register gives a few of them, believe me."

"Good!" exclaimed Billy.

"And moreover," continued the detective, "we were able to obtain additional information that may enable you to secure an introduction. We learned she hurt her arm while getting off a Fulton Avenue street-car. Now, your cue is to persuade her to let you file a damage claim; ought to be plain sailing."

"I get you," said Billy.

"Our charge will be two hundred dollars," announced the detective.

"But I paid you fifty twice," protested Lines, "and thirty-five another time."

"That was merely for expenses."

"Oh, I see," and the lawyer groaned as he reached for his check-book.

"Thank you, Mr. Lines, thank you. Now, if there's any occasion in the future when we can be of service to you we'll be only too pleased."

When the detective had gone Billy Lines leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"Well, anyway," he told himself, "I've found out who she is, and the rest will be easy."

A moment later he rung the buzzer and his stenographer entered.

"Anna," said he, "I wish you'd take a letter—it's important."

"Yes, sir, all ready."

"To Miss Alice E. Smith, 160 Pine Street, Brooklyn. Dear madam: I have been investigating the cause of your recent injury and can guarantee damages from the Traction Company if you will call at this office at your earliest convenience. Very truly yours.

"I want that letter to go at once," he added.

"It will get there quicker, Mr. Lines, if I take it myself," she replied, "and it will save you a two-cent stamp."

"I don't understand," said Billy.

"Well, I see Alice every night; she's my sister, you know."

"Good heavens! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know you had heard of the accident, and besides, Mr. Lines, as it wasn't very serious, we thought it would be best not to put in a damage claim. You see, the young man to whom she's engaged works for the traction company and—and—you understand?"

"Sure," said Billy, "I understand."

What the War Did for Anne

by Helen A. Holden

I.

ANNE surveyed the empty cake plate, then rose slowly to her feet. "Aren't you glad we didn't let a few sulky clouds interfere with our coming?" she demanded.

"We're not home yet," Pamela glanced apprehensively through the window at the dark clouds scudding across the sky.

The cozy tea-room of the Pointed Pine was deserted except for the two girls and a solitary young man at the table next theirs.

Anne had been sitting in front of the window. Each gust of wind had settled her hat further over her eyes.

She turned and laid her gloves, pocketbook, and handkerchief on the chair while she put up her hands to straighten her hat.

Both hands were busy with the hatpins when a curling, twisting blast came through the window, lifted the things from the chair, and scattered them over the floor.

The next instant Anne found herself dashing wildly after a handkerchief that seemed possessed with fiendish antics. It would remain quiet on the polished floor, inert like a dead thing, then just as she stooped to pick it up, madly off it would whisk.

"You fiend!" Anne made a sudden plunge, lost her balance, and sprawled at full length.

"Are you hurt?" The young man was bending over her in an instant.

"No," replied Anne as soon as she caught her breath, "but wasn't it funny? Why don't you laugh?"

"I will as soon as I know you are not hurt." The young man started to help her, but scorning any assistance, Anne sprang quickly to her feet.

After she had again straightened her hat, the young man handed her her gloves and pocketbook.

"I didn't see my handkerchief depart," Anne glanced carelessly over the floor. "I suppose the wind caused a graceful exit by one of the windows. Never mind, I can manage till I get home."

The young man hastily fumbled in his pocket.

"No, indeed," Anne anticipated him. "Thank you just the same, but I would rather borrow from Miss Hancock."

With a friendly little nod of dismissal she turned to her friend.

"Pamela, will you be awfully disappointed if we don't get that storm?"

They turned and left the room. As they stepped out onto the terrace in front of the tea-house, they both realized there was no question of uncertainty.

Instead of the few fleeting clouds, the whole sky was hung low and thick and dark. In place of the frolicksome breeze, the air was breathless, as if gathering force for some great effort. From the distance a low rumble of thunder could be heard.

"What do you say?" asked Anne. "Shall we wait till it is over, or shall we try to make the house before the rain begins?"

The Pointed Pine was perched high up on the mountainside. From the outskirts of the town of Labeaulieu the road covered about four miles. The path was but half the length, but it was steep, rough and narrow.

"If we could make it," said Pamela, "I would so much rather!"

"I know," said Anne, "there would be two good hours of practise before dinner."

"While time here would be just wasted," added Pamela.

"Let's try it," and Anne buttoned up her coat.

"Come on," Pamela buttoned up her coat and turned up her collar.

"Um, some dark!" remarked Anne as they plunged into the forest.

They had covered about half a mile when the storm broke.

It did not come gradually, gaining force each minute. It arrived in all its grown-up strength.

Big, strong trees bent almost as if they were saplings. The rain penetrated the leaves as if they were sponges. The thunder and lightning were incessant.

It grew darker and still darker.

"All right?" Pamela would call over her shoulder as she stumbled and slid over the slippery leaves and pine needles.

"All right!" would come the answering shout.

"Pamela," Anne announced presently, "if it gets any more slippery, I'm going to sit down and slide."

There was no answer. Then in a sudden flash of light Anne saw the path, as it unwound beneath her, empty.

"Pamela!" she called. "Pamela!"

Still no answer.

"This storm is making me panicky," Anne told herself. "Pamela has just gone a few steps ahead and can't hear."

At the risk of a bad fall she ran, stumbling and sliding, down the trail, calling loudly:

"Pamela! Pamela! Pamela!"

The rain and the wind were the only answers.

"I ought to have overtaken her by this time." Anne stopped at last for breath.

She turned and looked back up the steep, slippery path. As far as she could see in the darkness, it was empty.

"I don't see how I could have passed her." Then a sudden fear made her cold all over. "Perhaps Pamela sprained her ankle and fell."

She started back. The way seemed endless. For every step she took forward she seemed to slide back two. In some places she caught hold of the bushes and pulled herself up by main force, but anxiety made her unconscious of the difficulties.

At last the fury of the storm passed. The rain settled into a quiet shower. It scarcely penetrated the thick leaves of the trees.

Suddenly Anne stopped and listened.

Some one—or something—was coming rapidly toward her.

"Pamela! Pamela!" she shouted wildly.

There was no answer.

She made a trumpet of her hands, calling repeatedly.

"Helloa!" came back an answering shout.

He was quite near before Anne recognized the speaker as the young man of the Pointed Pine.

"Have you seen Pamela?" she called anxiously.

"No," came back the reply. "I haven't seen any one."

"Where can she be?" Anne looked accusingly at the young man as he reached her side.

"I only wish I knew," he replied. "Is she in the habit of—of—vanishing?"

"I mean Pamela, Pamela Hancock, that English girl who was drinking tea with me at the Pointed Pine," said Anne.

She then explained how she had missed her.

"I am certain I couldn't have stepped over or around her," said the young man encouragingly, "so she must be below somewhere."

He took Anne's arm in a firm clasp, and together they ran, slid, and jumped down the mountain path.

Before Anne could believe it possible they had regained the place from which she had started back.

Still no sign of Pamela.

"She must be somewhere," said Anne desperately.

"She's probably snug and warm at home by this time," suggested the young man.

"You don't know Pamela," replied Anne hotly.

"It's because I know you so much better than Pamela that I want to take you home before you catch your death of cold," argued the other.

At last he convinced Anne that standing about in her wet clothes would not bring her friend back—that the only really sensible thing to do was to return to the pension. If Pamela was not there an authorized search party could be started out.

So again they started down the mountain.

"I thought I was strong," said Anne, "but alone I could no more hop, skip and jump down the side of this mountain than I could fly."

"But I'm a native of Labeaulieu," explained the young man. "I know every stick and stone and every inch of ground for miles around."

"I'm an—"

"American," finished the young man for her.

"You couldn't tell by my mouth," said Anne, "for I haven't any gold filled teeth. There's another way they say they recognize Americans. It must be my shoes.

"How did this get here," she broke off suddenly, "I never passed this bridge before? I am sure it was not here when

Pamela and I came up this afternoon, or yesterday, or the day before."

"Have you always taken the other path?" asked the young man. "Of course, it is much prettier, but it is so much longer."

"We only knew about the road and the one path," replied Anne.

"Then that, of course, is what became of your friend," said the young man. "She kept to the usual path while you, in the darkness, missed it and stumbled on this other trail."

"It seemed unusually steep," but Anne sighed with relief over the thought that Pamela was not lying with a sprained ankle somewhere in the underbrush.

"And here we are at Labeaulieu," announced the young man, as a sudden turn brought them out of the woods.

Before them in the valley lay Labeaulieu, the court town of one of the smallest kingdoms in Europe.

The sun had come out as if it wanted a last look at so fair a scene before leaving it for the night.

A few steps farther and they were threading their way through the narrow streets of the town.

"I hate to trouble you," said Anne, "but my hat is oozing water as if it had been a reservoir for all the rain that came down. It has formed a nasty habit of running down my face and dripping off my chin. If I could borrow your handkerchief, Mr. —er—Mr. —"

"Verrencourt, Carlos Verrencourt." Then, with deep apologies for his thoughtlessness, Carlos plunged his hands into various pockets till he brought to light a handkerchief, which he hastily turned over to Anne.

That evening, in warm, dry slippers and a warm, cozy wrapper, Anne sat, Indian fashion, on her bed. Pamela, in equally warm, dry coverings, sat on the one easy chair.

"Mr. Carlos Verrencourt diagnosed the case correctly," said Anne. "You kept to the right path, while I wandered off in the darkness on to one we never knew existed. It was too bad you took that scramble back up the mountain after me."

"You did the same thing," rejoined the practical Pamela.

"I want to tell you," went on Anne slowly, "of something queer that happened. I was so waterlogged I borrowed a handkerchief from Don Carlos Verrencourt. As I mopped the water trickling down my face I sniffed a faint odor of lavender. I always keep a sachet of lavender in my handkerchief-case."

Anne paused thoughtfully.

"It seemed queer for a man to have his handkerchief scented," she continued, "but queerer still that it should be lavender."

"You don't mean—"

"I do," replied Anne. "When I reached here I looked at the handkerchief, and it was my very own—the one I lost at the Pointed Pine."

"Of course, he picked it up by mistake," said Pamela.

"Um, I wonder," murmured Anne.

II.

THE severe wetting failed to dampen the affection of either Anne or Pamela for the Pointed Pine.

Pamela went for the sake of the tea, with the walk thrown in. Anne went for the walk, with the tea thrown in.

For some reason, Carlos Verrencourt contracted the same habit. He never entered the cottage for tea, but he never failed to meet the girls either coming or going.

They soon became firm friends, and thought they had learned all there was to know about one another.

Pamela was at the conservatory at Labealieu studying music. One of a large English family, she was working in earnest, expecting to support herself later.

Anne's nearest relations were an uncle and aunt. They had left America two years before for Paris on account of a diplomatic position to which the uncle had been appointed. Anne hated Paris, so had been turned loose on the Continent with an American chaperon, Miss Biggs.

At last, tired of idling about, Anne had drifted to the conservatory at Labealieu. Here with students from England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, and Austria, she worked spasmodically.

Carlos was a native of Labeaulieu, though he had studied in Paris and at Oxford, he told them. His father was a busy, successful man, without much time to devote to his children. So the son, sure of his future, idled the days away without a serious thought.

"I know the kind of a father Carlos has," Anne confided to Pamela.

"When Carlos takes him his model of a new tire that will never wear out, he says, 'Run along, sonny, daddy's busy.' "

"I didn't know they were in the automobile business," said Pamela.

"Neither do I," replied Anne. "That was merely by way of giving you an example of the indifferent way in which his father treats Carlos. That boy really needs an object in life. He's just wasting his time with two girls when he ought to be doing things."

"Why don't you tell him?" suggested Pamela.

"I will," said Anne. "He will get his first lesson this afternoon."

"What do you mean?" asked Pamela.

"Instead of going to the Pointed Pine as usual, we will go to the Red Dragon."

"How can we let Carlos know?" asked Pamela anxiously.

"That's just it," replied Anne; "we can't, and we won't. If we stop his dangling about after us he may feel inspired to accomplish something useful."

This was the excuse Anne gave Pamela, but it was to cover the true state of her feelings. These she kept carefully hidden and would have been horrified if any one had even guessed at them.

The knowledge that had come to her suddenly almost overwhelmed her.

"It is absurd—it is ridiculous—it is positively unthinkable," she told herself severely. "Why, we've known each other scarcely two weeks, and here we are getting so—so—something—that makes us unhappy if we don't meet every day. I won't have it."

Although Pamela was with them, she was not of them. There was an undercurrent of sympathy that was binding Anne and Carlos closer and closer together.

In a sudden panic Anne was now putting out her strength to break the bond before it was too late.

So Anne and Pamela deserted the Pointed Pine. They left the town in quite the opposite direction and made for the Red Dragon.

It proved a dismal failure.

The way was long and uninteresting. The tea-house was noisy and crowded, and to add to their misery the tea was cold and the cakes were stale.

The following day saw them again on the old trail to the Pointed Pine.

Anne arranged a scheme with her conscience which she hoped would prove successful.

"When we get too—too—sympathetic, I will just look at Carlos's shoes. A girl could never care for a man who wears such atrocious looking shoes. They bulge where they ought to go in, and they go in where they ought to go out. They are altogether hideous."

"Where were you yesterday?" asked Carlos as soon as they met. "I couldn't imagine what had happened."

"We tried the Red Dragon for a change," replied Anne lightly.

"You might have let me know." There was a hurt feeling in Carlos's voice and he looked at Anne reproachfully.

"We spoke of it, but didn't know how to send you word," said Pamela hastily.

Anne said nothing, but fastened her eyes steadily on Carlos's feet.

"What's the matter?" Carlos stooped to examine his shoes. "Lacing's not untied," he assured her.

So the Pointed Pine became again a daily custom. Anne's misgivings about the shoe scheme grew, but as she could not think of anything better she clung to it.

One evening, some days later, Anne and Pamela sat chatting in the former's room.

"Anne," said Pamela suddenly, "when Carlos was getting that dust out of your eye, this afternoon, you know?"

"Yes," Anne nodded.

"He had one end of his handkerchief twisted up to dab with, but the other end waved about in the breeze. I'm not certain, but it looked a lot like a royal crest in the corner."

"For an apparently honest young man," rejoined Anne, "Carlos seems to have a peculiar fancy for other people's handkerchiefs."

"Of course he must have got it by mistake," agreed Pamela quickly; "probably the washwoman mixed them up."

"Um, I wonder," said Anne.

III.

THE next afternoon on the way down from the Pointed Pine, Anne gave a sudden sharp cry of pain.

"What is it?" exclaimed Pamela and Carlos in one breath.

"I know you told me, Pamela, that it was reckless to whittle while walking. And you warned me, Carlos, that your knife was sharp. You both had special powers of divination."

Anne held up her finger from which the blood was flowing. With her other hand she searched all the possible places for her handkerchief.

"Here is mine." While Pamela was hunting hers Carlos had found his, and proceeded to wrap it tightly around the cut. "That's too clumsy." He unwound it quickly. "I'll cut off some strips."

Anne protested vigorously. There was no sense in cutting up a good handkerchief. She merely wanted to hold something around the cut for a few minutes till it stopped bleeding.

Before she had finished speaking the handkerchief was in strips and her finger was neatly bound.

On reaching home, Anne examined the bandage by the light of the hall lamp.

The strips had been cut from the center of the linen. There was no monogram; there were no initials; there was no crest.

"Pamela," she called to her friend, who was already half way up the stairs, "just tell Miss Biggs that I have an errand to do, but that I will be back in plenty of time to dress for dinner."

Anne stepped out at the door and hurried along several blocks till she reached the business street.

"In a country where one buys stamps at tobacco shops, glass at confectioners', and salt at drug-stores, it is difficult to know where to begin." She looked up and down the street with a puzzled frown.

At last deciding on a book store, she plunged in.

"Have you photographs of the Royal Family?" she asked the clerk.

"But certainly," replied the clerk to Anne's great relief.

He placed on the counter before her photographs of the king and queen, two princes, and a little princess.

"Are these all?" asked Anne.

The clerk looked at her as one who thought, "What more can she expect?"

"I'll take the set," said Anne hastily and in some confusion.

As she left the store and started on her return to the pension, she came to a sudden halt.

"The clerk may have meant that he did not have any other photographs. He did not necessarily mean that there are no others."

Her thoughts kept pace with her feet as she hurried along looking for another book store.

"I must find out. I can't let it go on like this. Carlos's fingers shook so while he wound that namby, pamby little scratch that—that—if Pamela hadn't been there I don't know what would have happened. I won't be able to manage him much longer, and I'm beginning to have doubts about myself.

"I might as well face it," Anne kept steadily on, but was thankful for the dusk. "I am going to fall out—for I'm already in—before he discovers it, if that handkerchief with the royal crest really belongs to Carlos.

"Here I've been trying to fall in love with Billy for over a year and I haven't been able to manage it. Then why should a stranger—in less than a month—I do hope the washwoman got those handkerchiefs mixed."

Anne reached the second book store.

"Have you a photograph of the crown prince?" She had overcome the shyness that had prevented her asking the question at the first store.

IV.

"Miss Biggs," Anne burst into the private sitting room where her chaperon was peacefully sewing. "I've decided on the Tyrol for a little rest and recreation.

"But, my dear—" The suddenness of the announcement left Miss Biggs scarcely breath to speak.

"Yes," hurried on Anne, "we will leave by an early train to-morrow."

"But, my dear," again protested Miss Biggs, "we're hardly settled here—and your music—you've made such a good beginning."

"That's it," said Anne, "it's the music. You see, it's this way. I've been working too hard, and besides—oh, yes—it's a lot the fault of the professor. In America, you know, we just nod good-by and get up and leave as quickly as possible to make room for the next victim. Do you think that is the custom here?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Miss Biggs, bewildered.

"Not at all." Anne grew more eloquent as she continued. "When the lesson is over I am obliged to listen to flowery speeches; then I extend my hand, which the professor kisses."

"My dear, my dear," faintly protested Miss Biggs, "how very—er—unnecessary."

"It's a fact," said Anne. "At first the novelty of the performance helps one through the operation, but soon it becomes too, too, unbearably sticky. So I've decided to chuck it."

As Anne hurried into her room, Miss Biggs's protest followed her.

"It's very sudden."

Anne unwrapped a paper and took out a photograph. She placed it on the dresser facing her.

"Prince Carlos, I salute you," she said, as she placed a hand beside her head, palm outward.

She crossed the room, turned, and came back.

"Prince Carlos," she picked up the photograph and looked steadily into the eyes that met hers so frankly—"you have a disconcerting way of following one about. I could feel it even as I crossed the room through the back of my head.

"Prince Carlos," she continued, "you force me to turn you with your face to the wall."

V.

After an unusually warm day the evening breeze was very grateful to the people of the little Tyrolese village. The soft moonlight made wonderful pictures of the lake and the mountains.

Anne came slowly into the room where Miss Biggs sat sewing. She took off her hat and dropped into a chair.

"Biggsy, dear," she began, as she laid her hat over the other's work, "don't you know that if you sew so much you will turn into a needle, with thread for arms and a thimble for a head?"

"But, Miss Anne," said the ever protesting Biggs, "the *signora* promised to show me the fancy stitches to-morrow if I would get this groundwork finished to-night."

"All right," laughed Anne, "but don't forget to go to bed, or you won't be able to get up in the morning."

"Did you have a nice day?" asked Miss Biggs, as she worked away.

"Oh, yes," replied Anne in a lifeless voice. "We walked miles and miles, and ate our supper at a little hotel overlooking the lake. By the way, what is all the commotion about? Bell-boys and maids and porters and proprietors are hopping about like distracted toads."

"Ah, but you could never guess what

excitement we have been in all day." Miss Biggs's work dropped at last unheeded to her lap. "The house has been swept and dusted from roof to cellar, clean hangings have gone up, there has been an entirely new arrangement of furniture."

Miss Biggs paused for breath.

"July 17, 1914. I can't remember that it is any one's birthday or any yearly cleaning day," murmured Anne. "Just what is it all about?"

"The coming of royalty, my dear," announced Miss Biggs triumphantly. "A king, or prince, or—or—some one of the reigning house of—of—somewhere, I can't remember names. Anyway, he's here—arrived just before dinner."

"He might better stay at home," muttered Anne.

"Why, Miss Anne, that doesn't sound a bit like you," said Miss Biggs.

"What I mean," explained Anne hastily, "is that kings and princes ought never be allowed to leave the royal palaces without crowns or something distinctive. They ought never to ramble about like other people."

"I don't think they do, though perhaps I don't understand," apologized Miss Biggs.

"Of course you don't," said Anne, "but I'm tired and sleepy, so instead of explaining I'm going to bed. Good night."

But instead of going to bed, Anne stepped out on the terrace. Memories she had been trying hard to forget had been rudely awakened. Perhaps the fresh evening breeze might help to banish them.

She walked to the edge of the terrace and looked down at the little village. Voices and laughter floated up, softened and harmonized by distance.

"Anne." The name came out of the moonlight nearer and more distinct than other sounds. Anne smiled reminiscently.

"Anne." As it came again Anne put out a trembling hand. It was a protest against the moonlight playing such tricks with her memory.

Then, as if impelled by some unknown force, she glanced up.

"Carlos."

The breeze scarcely caught the word as it passed the terrace on its way to the balcony above.

"Just a second and I'll be with you." Carlos stepped over the rail of his balcony as if it were a nightly habit of his. He leaned over, clasped the pillar that supported it, and dropped lightly beside Anne.

"How good it is to see you again." He caught Anne by both hands as if he never meant to let go.

"How are you ever going to get back up there again?" Anne glanced anxiously at the balcony from which Carlos had dropped.

"Thank you, I've just come," replied Carlos. "Anne, what made you run away?"

"Prince Carlos, what made you deceive me?"

Then, because of the soft breeze, because of the glowing moonlight, and because they were together again, they both laughed.

"Now we are going to have one glorious holiday," declared Carlos. "We have to make up for all those stifling, empty days in which I have been looking for you."

But Anne shook her head.

"Why not?" demanded Carlos hotly.

"The prince is surely wise enough to understand," said Anne.

"He will never understand why being prince interferes with his being Carlos," he replied quickly.

"He refuses to understand," persisted Anne.

"Anne dear, the love of—"

"No, no," broke in Anne hastily, "please, not to-night. We need the hard sunlight to help. There is no use trying to reason on a night like this."

"There never was such a night." Carlos stood beside Anne, and together they looked out over the lake and the mountains and the tiny village, all soft and shiny in the moonlight.

"You don't act the least bit glad to see me." Carlos turned accusingly back to the girl at his side.

"I still feel a little strange with the prince," said Anne.

"I am here to devote myself to the task of making you better acquainted," replied Carlos. "We will begin to-morrow morning promptly at 9.30." He held out his hand in a friendly good night.

He stepped toward the slender pillar by which he expected to gain his balcony; then he stopped, laughing softly.

"When I arrived I upset the whole house," he chuckled. "Instead of accepting the royal suite which had been prepared for me, I chose my present quarters. I had inquired and learned that your apartment was down here. With your terrace so easily accessible, I would have defied the custom of all the princes in Christendom."

"Whoever heard of a prince anywhere but in the royal suite?" laughed Anne. "I am sadly afraid you like playing Carlos better than the prince."

"When you begin to be as kind to the prince as you were to Carlos—" he began unsteadily.

"No, no." Anne put out a protesting hand. "We agreed not to talk about it, you know, till to-morrow."

When the next morning came, however, Anne found the sunshine warm instead of cold. The whole day was so full of joy and happiness and light-heartedness she could not bring herself to spoil it with serious talk.

Thus day after day slipped by, and Anne shrank more and more from what she knew must come, and coming would be the end.

For a prince and an American girl there was no future. Carlos seemed to have accepted, and to feel satisfied with the present. But Anne's heart misgave her, for she realized that the long, happy days were only making the end more difficult.

When alone in her room, she felt strong in her grim resolve. Each night she would promise herself:

"To-morrow we will have our talk. Then Carlos will go back to the palace at Labeaulieu and will marry some stupid princess. I will go to Paris to Aunt Julia. I will take the memory of these days, and will tie it up and will lock it up with some fresh lavender. No one will ever know what is hidden away in that closed drawer—not even Biggs.

"It can't go on. It must not go on." She would get up and walk nervously about the room. "To-morrow will be the end."

In the morning Anne would keep her hands clenched and her lips firm as she started out to meet the waiting Carlos.

His quick step of pleasure toward her, his eyes so shiny with joy and happiness, made Anne's hands go out in response to his, and her lips tremble into a smile as she whispered to herself:

"Not to-day—to-morrow."

VI.

"Biggs," said Anne abruptly one evening as they sat together in their private parlor, "did you ever realize that to-morrow is always to-morrow; it is never to-day?"

"To-morrow is to-morrow," repeated the bewildered Biggs. She tilted her head in a listening attitude. "What is that?" she asked.

"Sounds like serenading," and Anne stepped out on the terrace.

On the ground below she could make out the dim figures of men.

"Anne." The voice came from the shadow against the house where it was darkest.

"It almost looks as if the prince were in hiding." Anne glanced from the shadow to the men below.

"Don't you know it? It's our national hymn. They've come to serenade me, but I don't want them to see me. They've heard already that I'm leaving."

"Leaving!" It was what Anne had been anticipating, but now that it had come she felt weak and dizzy.

"War had been declared!" Time was short, and Carlos had to hurry. "It may mean that every country in Europe will be in it before the end."

"Carlos, are you dreaming?" Anne peered at him anxiously through the dusk.

"I only wish I were," muttered Carlos; "but I am leaving now in a few minutes."

"You are leaving?" Anne leaned up against the railing. Carlos must not see how she was trembling.

"Anne"—the long pent-up passion broke from the man—"I always thought a lot of rot had been written about love at first sight. But the first time I saw you, dear—that first day at the Pointed Pine—I kept your handkerchief because I wanted something that belonged to you. From that time nothing in the world has counted but you—you—you. My love is so strong in the end it would make you care. But now I must go away. If I could only stay I could teach you to love me; I am sure of it, Anne."

Anne shook her head, but she smiled sadly as she turned and looked down at the little village below, twinkling in the darkness.

The last verse of the hymn was finished and the men were going silently away.

"Anne, you don't answer," faltered Carlos.

"It's all so hopeless," replied Anne dully.

There was a long silence.

At last Anne turned, eyes dewy with a feeling too deep for expression. The place beside her was empty.

Noiselessly Carlos had crossed the terrace. He stood by the pillar, hesitating, as if the climb was more than he could manage.

"Carlos," the words, half uttered, died on Anne's lips. Unnoticed in the darkness, she stretched out arms in an agony of appeal.

Slowly and laboriously the prince made his way to his balcony. Anne pressed her hand tightly over her mouth to keep back the cry that seemed forcing it way through her lips.

Without turning back the prince disappeared.

Anne put her hand on the railing to steady herself. When things had stopped going around she felt her way gropingly to her room. She walked as one who had become suddenly blind. She sank down in the darkness, dull and lifeless.

At last she became conscious of noises in the corridor. Quick steps were hurrying back and forth before her door.

She sprang to her feet, switched on the light and hurried to her desk.

Snatching up a sheet of paper, she wrote:

DEAR CARLOS:

I can't have you go misunderstanding me. Though we must never see each other again, I want you to know that you can't teach me, because, I know already.

Yours always,

ANNE.

VII.

OUTSIDE the château the moonlight made it almost as light as day. Inside, the shaded electric lights shed a bright and cheerful glow.

The guests were arriving. Anne, with the help of Miss Biggs, was arranging some flowers which had just been received.

"It does seem wicked to spend so much on flowers," said Miss Biggs, "when the war has left so much poverty and distress.

"But thank goodness the war is over," said Anne, "so good times are coming."

"They are not here yet," protested Miss Biggs, "and think how far the money spent for these roses would go among the poor!"

"You forget, Biggs," said Anne, "that the man who raises the roses has to be supported. Besides, the little old woman who sells them outside the Madeleine must have her share. And she has a big family, too. They always do, you know."

Anne had kept to her original plan. After that eventful night in the little Tyrolese village she had returned to her aunt, and had continued to live with her in her château outside Paris.

She felt that the intervening time had made her a little wiser, much sadder, and infinitely older.

Her aunt was very fond of entertaining.

Her château had become a meeting place for all kinds of people.

During the evening Anne, wandering about among the guests, heard her name called.

"Where is Anne?" asked Aunt Julia. "We always count on Anne's playing."

"Here I am," answered Anne. "What would you like me to play?"

"Anything—merry." The last word Aunt Julia added in a whisper. "There are so many wounded soldiers here to-night they need cheering."

Anne sat down at the piano, and her fingers wandered idly over the keys.

Suddenly she listened in startled surprise. Her heart beat quickly.

It was the national hymn of Labeaulieu she was listening to. She had not heard it since that night so long ago—the night she and Carlos had parted.

The hymn ended in a discordant crash. Anne became suddenly conscious that it was she who had been playing.

With a hurried apology about the heat she rose from the piano and made her way out through the open French window on to the balcony.

"I thought I had you put away with lavender, safe under lock and key." She leaned her hot forehead against the cool stone pillar.

"Anne," came the familiar voice from the shadow.

"It brings it all back so vividly." She shivered, though the night breeze was warm.

"Anne." The voice was so human Anne's heart stood still.

"Carlos!" she cried, as a figure stepped out into the moonlight.

The boy Carlos had disappeared. A man, sun-tanned and grave, yet with Carlos's eyes, had returned.

"Did you mean that?" Carlos handed Anne a paper.

By the moonlight she easily read:

DEAR CARLOS:

I can't have you go misunderstanding me. Though we must never see each other again, I want you to know that you can't teach me, because, I know already.

Yours always,

ANNE.

"Every word." Anne met his eyes bravely.

"It kept me safe, and I've been through hell." Carlos reached out for the paper, as if it was too precious to be long out of his possession.

"I know," said Anne sadly; "I can't tell you how my heart ached when I heard that you had lost your kingdom."

"In the old days I wanted you, Anne, in spite of my kingdom. Now, only because it is lost, can I claim a new one at your hands.

Carlos the man held out his arms.

"My prince," murmured Anne, as she walked straight into them.

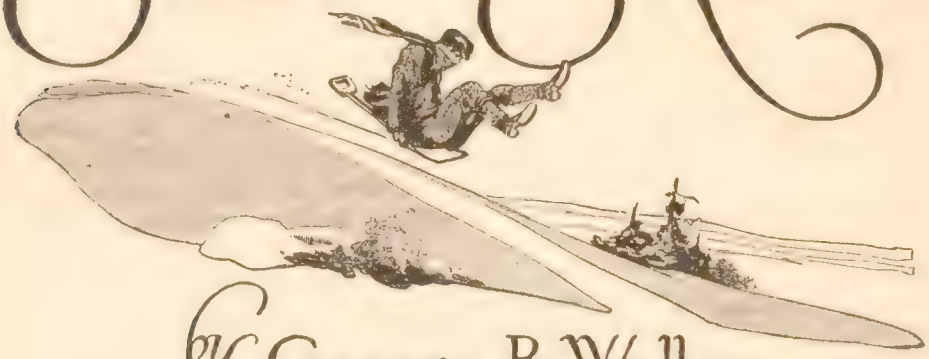
THE CAPTAIN

HE rallied to the rolling drums
When he was young and spry,
And when age thinned his grizzled locks
And dimmed his eagle eye;
But when one morning in his dreams
He heard the bugles call,
He rose and took his sword and sash
And medals from the wall.

He folded all his blankets up
In marching order neat,
Put on his faded uniform
Complete from head to feet,
Lay down upon his bed, prepared
To answer to the roll,
A gallant soldier to the last,
And yielded up his soul.

Minna Irving.

Slide ≈ Shovel



by George B. Walker

"NOW you *have* queered it. If you'd been willin' to sign up, we'd be about where we were when we took up with this no-good proposition. Dafney said that this 'd be his last offer, an' I'm 'bout ready to drift for a fresh diggin'."

Al Graves, prospector, grizzled veteran of years spent in the alkali flats and bare foothills of Nevada and Arizona, glared balefully at his young camp companion.

Frank Griffin, the other man, stared dully at the sheet-iron stove, shifted uncertainly on his inverted cracker-box chair, and slowly faced his partner.

They were the owners of the much hooted and laughed at "G and G" mine, an abandoned working in the "M.O.X." mining district in the southern part of Nevada. Jeered and made fun of by the miners in the district, Graves and Griffin, who were immediately called the "Geegees," had reopened an abandoned working, cleaned it out and incidentally put a goodly part of their savings into it, without the slightest result, other than to tunnel through several feet of hard, barren rock. They had been at it now for six months.

Twice before they had been on the point of giving up, when Dafney, manager of a nearby mine, visited their camp and offered to buy the property for the amount they had invested. And it was the younger of the two partners who had turned him down each time.

This third cool rejection by Griffin jarred Graves immeasurably.

"How much have you put into this thing?" Griffin asked him.

"Close to thirty-five hundred," was the answer.

Griffin figured rapidly on the margin of the newspaper which served as a tablecloth, pulled a check-book from his pocket, filled out the small white slip and handed it to his partner.

"There's your money," he said quietly. "But we're not quits, because I can't pay you anything for the time you have worked here. How—"

"Young feller," interrupted Graves, "have I said anything about quittin'?"

"Not quite, but—"

"But nothin'. This ain't no good, an' what's more I'm stickin'," and the older man tore the check in pieces.

"I thought you would," and Griffin smiled.

"Sure," blustered the other. "An' if any one should ask you, tell 'em I'm sure we're close to a big strike right now."

"It looks like it to me, too. I had a hard job turning down Dafney's offer this time, because I got a letter from Martha in the last mail saying that the baby is sick and ought to go to a different climate, according to the doctors. But I feel sure that there's something here. If there wasn't, Martha's Uncle Jim would never have left these claims to her with the instruction that they were never to be sold. The stuff's here and we're going to uncover it."

"We sure are," Graves agreed.

II.

For the following six months the "Geegee" partners drove their tunnel into the shale of the hogback behind their camp, working steadily and ignoring the gibes and fun-making of the hard-rock men about them. They continued to be the laughing stock of the "M.O.X." district, but they stuck at their work and followed a barren white bull quartz vein into the mountain. There was not even an indication of mineral.

From bad, things went to worse, and the former joshers in the district reached the point where their gibings ceased and the partners were considered plain, unadulterated fools. Even the elements seemed against them, for a grubstake they were freighting to their camp from the nearest town was ruined in a big storm, and they had very little money left.

The climax of their misfortune was reached when a letter arrived from Griffin's wife stating that mountain air was imperative for the baby.

"That's certainly hard luck, boy," Graves sympathized when the letter was read aloud. "There's only one way out now."

"You mean sell to Dafney?"

"What else?"

"No," and Griffin shook his head doggedly.

"Yes," shouted the other, jumping to his feet and pacing up and down the floor.

"I won't quit till I'm out."

"No," gritted the other, "You'll hang the two of us so high we'll never get down again. Well, go ahead. I'm through," and he strode out into the night.

III.

The next morning Griffin arose, cooked and ate his breakfast alone and opened the cabin door to find the snow hip-deep outside. A heavy white mantle had dropped quietly over the surrounding hills during the night and Griffin sighed as he realized the tedious trip through the drifts to the tunnel working.

Mechanically he began his day's work and a few hours later Graves entered the tunnel to find him pounding a drill in the face of it.

"Come out on the dump," said the older man, "I want to talk to you."

"When I finish this hole," was the reply.

"Thick headed sap," grunted Graves as he walked out of the drift.

In half an hour the tapping of the single jack as it met the head of a drill in the tunnel ceased and as Griffin walked out on the dump his partner knocked the ashes from a venerable corncob pipe.

"Frank," he began abruptly, "you owe it to Martha and the baby to see this thing right. You're takin' an awful chance to hang on here any longer. We've worked like a couple o' slaves fer close to a year and what is there to show for it? Nothing but a lot of bull quartz and a two hundred foot tunnel."

Griffin seated himself on the rim of a wheelbarrow and Graves continued:

"Why, Frank, if I had a wife like Martha and as fine a kid as that youngster o' yours, I'd think o' them first. Stop chasing the gold phantom, boy. You haven't got the right. Let's get out while we can."

"Dafney won't make us another offer."

"He'll pay us what we've put into it."

"How do you know?"

"I was talking to him last night."

There was a long pause.

"I won't see Dafney," the younger man gritted, "but it does look—"

"I'll see him," interrupted Graves.

"Give me power of attorney an' I'll do it. It's the only thing to do."

"The only thing," slowly admitted the man on the wheelbarrow.

As he made out the paper empowering Graves to sell the claim the younger man's face lighted with some of his old time spirit.

"Let's fire the last round of holes, Al, then maybe we won't have to see Dafney."

Graves snatched the paper impatiently and started down the snow-filled trail.

Griffin watched his partner's figure until it was hidden by a bend in the trail, then taking dynamite, percussion caps, fuse and loading stick, he entered the tunnel and loaded the four holes he had drilled there. Spitting the fuses when the holes were loaded he ran out to the dump and waited.

The shots went off with a dull "funk—funk—funk—funk" and almost before the smoke and dust had settled he went into the tunnel again.

He reappeared instantly with an armful of rock fragments dotted with free gold.

"Al! Al!" he shouted, and when there was no response from his partner he floundered along the trail in pursuit of Graves.

Realizing the futility of trying to catch up with him Griffin returned to the dump where he stood helplessly for a moment. Was there no way to block the sale of the property now that a rich strike had been made?

Presently his eyes rested on the dim outlines of a shovel a short distance from the tunnel portal and a wild idea formed in his brain. Grasping the shovel he ran to the edge of the dump, glanced down the sixty degree hillside and smiled.

"By George," he shouted excitedly, "I'll ride the old shovel down on the snow and stop Al where he swings into the cañon from the trail."

The weather had changed to a biting cold and there was a heavy crust on the snow.

Placing some of the ore fragments in his coat pockets he sat on the iron blade of the shovel, grasped the handle in front of him and teetering on the edge of the dump slipped over on to the sharp slope.

He regretted his action almost immediately, for the shovel, slick from constant usage, picked up speed alarmingly and plunged downward at a terrific gait. Control was out of the question and Griffin hung on and wondered how long it would take him to make the thousand foot drop to the main cañon bed.

The blade of the shovel became pleasantly warm and then unbearably hot. The rush of wind blinded the man, he whirled about helplessly, there was a sudden jolt, a sense of flying, a crash, and then oblivion.

IV.

GRAVES waded steadily through the heavy snow on his way down the trail to the cañon. He heard the shots set off by his partner and the sound drew his lips into a straight firm line.

"Cantankerous chump," he muttered. "He ought to be walking along the trail with me now. I believe in a man stickin' O. K., but this here bull-headed idea ain't proper by a long shot." And he kept on down the trail.

Rounding a granite cropping he came out on the cañon wagon road and stopped with a gasp when he saw Griffin sprawled out in the snow a few feet away from him.

"Blown up," he grumbled, running toward the prostrate figure. "On purpose," he thought. "No, for he'd have no reason," he corrected himself, and then seeing the shovel for the first time, "What the Sam Hill is that doin' here?"

Griffin stirred, opened his eyes, and then sat up suddenly.

"Al, Al," he shouted, falling back with a groan.

"Right here, partner," Graves answered soothingly. "What is it?"

"Slideshovel— Bonanza —Gold — High-grade," muttered Griffin incoherently.

But Graves understood.

"Slideshovel she is," he agreed, and so the Slideshovel mine, rich among rich gold bonanzas, was uncovered and named.

A Man and a Dog

by Mary Isabel Boynton

THERE was no distinguishing feature about him. He was just a dog. Too large to be a toy, too small to be called noble. A touch of brown saved him from being just "yaller."

His hair was long and rough, but it did not curl, and his tail may have been as Mother Nature made it, or it may have been shortened by accident. Surely no one purposely cut it the awkward length it was.

His ears were undecided whether to lop or stand erect, and the eyes, naturally soft and intelligent—his one claim to beauty—were dull from hunger, grief and fatigue. He was thin to emaciation.

His master was dead. The only master he had ever known, to whom he had been sight itself. Safely he had led him about the crowded streets, sure-footed and swift and faithful. Willingly he had done his tricks, finding his reward in the sound of the pennies and nickels—and yes—sometimes dimes, as they dropped into the tin cup.

Their home was a basement room, the food ofttimes none too plentiful, but it was home, and his master loved him.

He had stayed, silent and sorrowful, beside his master's body, the only creature who really mourned the blind old man, and when they carried the remains away he followed, silent and unnoticed, to the grave.

For some days he stayed there, a faithful sentinel still on guard, until finally he realized that his duty here was ended, and he trotted away.

But people seemed suspicious of a strange dog, and as the days went by, his appearance did not improve. Sometimes some one gave him a kind word, or flung him a bone, but he soon learned that nobody wanted him, and he trotted on, footsore and weary and hungry, more and more avoiding the haunts of human beings, occasionally resting in the shade of some friendly bush, sleeping behind stone-walls, lapping greedily from a wayside brook, and looking with dull, wishful eyes towards that far and unknown country to which he was traveling.

Looking, listening, always looking for his beloved master. Listening for the sound of a voice forever stilled.

It was one of June's loveliest days, when Nature is lavishing every charm at her command upon the earth. But the man sitting beneath the shade of the horse-chestnut tree in the wayside pasture did

not see any of its beauty, for he was looking into Eternity.

His very attitude bespoke the down-and-outer. He had but one leg; a well worn crutch lay on the grass beside him. Unclean and unkempt, he was a pitiable object. He held a revolver in his hand—his very last possession except the ragged garments that but poorly covered his body.

At first he handled it carefully, almost fearfully, but as he continued to look upon it his manner grew more confident, and he addressed it aloud.

"I've kept you for just this emergency," he said slowly. "There's no place in the world for a cripple when strong and well men are starving. I'm a failure even as a tramp. If there is a God I don't see why He hasn't removed my worthless carcass from the face of the earth, and if He won't, I must." He fell silent and his thoughts went out to the woman, miles away, waiting for his return.

How brave and patient she had been through all the heart-breaking years! Even she would be better off without him. The pity and the irony of it all!

His fingers relaxed their hold, and the revolver slid with a soft thud to the grass. With his face buried in his hands, great heaving sobs shook his thin body as the last minutes of his life passed away.

A bird twittered merrily from a branch above his head. A squirrel scampered across the grass and, at a safe distance, inspected the shining object by his side. Not liking its looks, he scurried away again. Summer insects whirred and hummed about him. Everything spoke of life and harmony and beauty save the one human being in the picture, the one note of abject misery in the whole peaceful scene.

A dog, footsore and weary, with eyes dulled from hunger and fatigue, left the highway and slowly trotted across the field. Suddenly he stopped. Before him was a man, unclean and unkempt, misery written plain on the bowed figure, while silent sobs shook the thin shoulders under the ragged coat.

The dog saw the revolver and backed away, a ridge of hair, stiff and bristling, rising along his back. He did not know what the object was, but he did not like the look of it. Then his eyes returned to the bowed figure.

Here was something he could understand after a certain dog fashion. Had this man lost his only friend, too? Was he also hungry and weary, and searching for that far country for which he himself hunted?

He uttered a little whine—it was scarce more than the whisper of one—his tail ready to wag a friendly greeting if a kind word came, but none did. It was quite evident the man did not hear him.

So, softly, cautiously, he crept nearer, the carpet of velvety grass completely muffling his approach, and with a courage born of desperation—for he knew the man needed him—he suddenly thrust his dry, hot muzzle between the man's face and hands!

"What in h—!" the man started to cry, jumping back so violently he all but lost his balance.

The dog jumped, too, in the opposite direction. The effect of his friendly overtures was not just what he had expected, but he kept his eyes on the miserable white face that looked at him with more of fear than anger, and he did not see anything to be afraid of.

So they regarded each other for a second or two, then the dog slowly, gravely, reared himself on his haunches and unmistakably bowed to the man!

The man rubbed his eyes and looked closer. Surely it was all a trick of his overwrought imagination. One did not go about meeting strange dogs in cow-pastures who bowed to one.

The dog eyed his audience of one shrewdly. Something he saw in the face gave him courage. Once more—and this time the man knew it was no trick of his imagination—the dog reared himself on his hind legs and walked slowly, but quite

steadily, toward him, until, when within proper distance, he once more bowed and politely extended his right paw to shake hands!

"Well, I'll be—" The man could find no fitting simile to fit the occasion, but he shook the proffered paw warmly.

Dropping on all fours, the dog sprang forward, whining joyfully, and showering caresses on the man's none too clean hands and unshaved face. But these were details to which he was quite indifferent. He had found a friend—of this he felt certain—and in the exuberance of his joy he barked frantically, until the man silenced him, when he proceeded to display his repertoire of tricks, to the astonishment and evident delight of his new-found friend.

He died; he said his prayers; he essayed to "tango," but weakness and lack of his master's accustomed whistled tune prevented him doing himself justice. He bravely attempted his somersault stunts, but from weakness and sore feet ended rather wabbly. When finally he advanced and with his comical grave politeness bowed again, the stony misery of the man's face broke, fell away like a mask, and he laughed!

The laugh set the dog into feeble capers of delight, and the sound, so strange, startled the man. He looked about him. The black despair in which he had been engulfed was gone!

He saw instead the beauty of the June morning. He felt the soft air caress his face, heard the joyful singing of the birds, the friendly hum of insects, and with the realization of it all the sweetness of life returned to him.

He snatched up his crutch from the ground and got to his feet, pulling his tattered old hat from his pocket as he did so, and flung it high into the air with a shout of joy, while the dog gamboled weakly around him.

"Do you see this?" the man asked, picking up the revolver from the grass and showing it to the dog, who promptly backed away.

"You needn't be afraid; this revolver means life, not death, to you and me, comrade. We'll go to the nearest town and sell it. It means a bite and a bone for us, old boy. With your tricks we'll earn many a penny. When you get fed up and rested I'll teach you some new ones. Then we'll journey slowly toward home.

"Home! God! I never expected to see it again! We'll go back to the woman who will give us a royal welcome and make her happy. Ah! comrade, what can't we do? A man and a dog! Come!"

Together they who had so recently entered the pasture alone and in despair, left it with hope and joy. When they reached the highway the man paused, and with bared head lifted his face to heaven.

"For deliverance from death and despair I thank Thee," he said aloud; then, looking down at the dog with tear-wet eyes, a sound, part sob, part laugh, gurgled in his throat.

"You're a mighty queer-looking angel," he said, caressing the eager, faithful face uplifted to his, "but if God Almighty ever sent an angel to save a man He sent you to me!"

And so they journeyed together through the long summer days and sweet summer nights, from town to village, working slowly toward one objective point. The nickels and dimes came in plenty, and soon swelled to dollars. The man and dog lived—so it seemed to them—fit for kings. Except on stormy nights, their bed was made in some hay-field, or in a sheltering, sweet-scented wood, that they would not have exchanged for the best berth in a Pullman sleeper.

They worked their way to the sea, where at the shore resorts they found people ever at leisure to be amused, and willing to pay liberally for the amusement, too. The dog was not handsome—far from it—but he was an affectionate fellow, and keenly intelligent, who made friends wherever he went, not alone for himself, but for his master also, who, as they journeyed on their leisurely way, was

teaching the dog new and really wonderful tricks.

It was at a well known and popular resort, one day in early autumn, that a portly man, whose profession was not difficult to guess from his appearance, detached himself from a group of admiring spectators after an exhibition in front of a hotel piazza, and accosted the cripple.

"What price will you take for that dog?" he asked brusquely.

"He is not for sale," the man answered quietly.

The hotel guest lifted his brows quizzically.

"I guess I could offer enough to make it an object," he said, jingling the silver in his pocket significantly. "Eh?"

The man looked from the dog to the questioner, a baffling smile on his lips.

"I said he was not for sale," he said again, and then: "That isn't a dog."

"Isn't a dog?" the other ejaculated, "why— What you giving me?"

"That is an angel, and angels are not bought and sold." Turning, the man whistled and walked away.

"Not a dog! An angel!" the would-be purchaser muttered to himself. "The man's crazy! and he looks sane enough. Too bad! too bad! I'd like that dog in my business. He'd be worth his weight in gold."

Those last words, heard by the man as he walked away, fell on fertile soil. Later when some one attempted to find the man with the wonderful performing dog to show to a newly arrived guest, he could not be located.

Well beyond the range of prying eyes, on a ledge of rock that jutted far out into the ocean, he sat, the dog at his feet. The stars looked down on them from a sky of blue-blackness. In the far west the silver rim of a tiny new moon was beginning to tip over the horizon. Still the man sat there, the roar of the surf in his ears, the salt spray sometimes splashing his face.

The lights in the hotel were out when he finally got to his feet, and looked down to the dog.

"I guess our tramping days are over, comrade," he said. "We'll write a letter to the little woman telling her we are coming back to her, and after we finish here we'll take a train and go to her, and we'll prepare for a new life, the three of us together."

A crowd surged into the theatre—a high-class vaudeville house—and many paused to see the photographs displayed in the foyer, conspicuous among them being a group showing a man and a dog, whose pictured performance at least, was truly a marvel of canine intelligence. Above the frame holding the photographs was a card printed in red letters, on which one might read these words: "A Man And A Dog."

It was certainly a realistic scene the rising of the curtain disclosed. A wayside pasture on an early summer's day. One could almost feel the gentle breeze stirring the leaves of the horse-chestnut tree under which sat a man, unclean and unkempt, a revolver held in one hand. He had but one leg. A crutch lay beside him in the grass.

A soliloquy follows in which the audience learns of his ill success in the struggle with life, and his determination to end it all. The revolver slides to the ground and he buries his face in his hands.

But what is this? A dog, foot-sore and weary, enters the pasture and trots across the stage. Then follows a scene—ever new to the audiences who witness it from day to day—but burned into the memory of the man on the stage, though the dog does many wonderful tricks of which he was quite ignorant on that first memorable occasion.

A storm of applause follows their exit. It continues and they come on again to bow their thanks, while the eyes of the man seek out a woman in the wings who never tires of seeing the performance which means much more to her than the comfortable income it brings in.

The Log-Book

By the Editor

IF you look back at the leader in last October's Log, you will find that I promised some day to give you a regular moving-picture novel, one that told about the various happenings and vicissitudes that enter into the filming of a five-reeler. Well, you're going to find that promise redeemed next month; not only that, but the scene of the story is laid in the heart of pictureland—Los Angeles, in Southern California, where over eighty per cent of the "movies" made in the United States are turned out. According to the Los Angeles *Daily Times*, there are twenty producing companies, who spend over a million dollars a month in the city of Los Angeles, which now has an estimated population of 550,000. The census of 1910 gave it only 320,000.

Just as automobiles have boomed Detroit, so have motion pictures proved the growth-spark to Los Angeles, dating from June, 1909, when the first moving-picture stage in California was erected in Edendale. Some jump in seven years to 1916, when one of the twenty companies now has an investment of half a million dollars in its studio and owns 18,000 acres of land in San Fernando Valley. For the movies resemble golf in that they constitute a game requiring vast spaces in which to be properly played.

In Los Angeles, then, and its neighborhood, there is opportunity for a corking tale of adventure and romance circling about motion-picture making. And in

"OVER A CLIFF AT POINT FIRMIN"

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK

you will find that these possibilities have been realized to the full. Although Mr. Cook already knew the place, he made a special trip to the Coast last spring in order to be sure of his ground. Point Firmin, where the story opens, is just beyond San Pedro, the Pacific port of Los Angeles, and is a favorite spot for picture making, being within easy motor-ride of the city.

The first of the twenty-seven chapters of the story starts with a snag against which the director has run in the taking of a picture. The leading man balks at a stunt required of him, and the hero steps in to fill the breach. He has tried for days to break into the movies, as hundreds of others are doing out in Los Angeles and elsewhere; but he has a stronger reason than the mere securing of a job for signing up with this particular company. What it is, and the thrilling experiences into which

his quest leads him, are told by Mr. Cook with graphic power. Don't miss "Over a Cliff at Point Firmin." And if you have any friends in Los Angeles, be sure to write them about this first novel to play up their fastest growing city.

"THOSE EYES FROM KARNA"

BY GEORGE FOXHALL

Author of "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street"

is the new Serial starting next month. "It was a cheerful September noon that Marcus Brown came into my office and told me that his father had been murdered and the Green Eyes of Karna stolen."

The foregoing opening sentence from the story is surely enough for me to say of it in the way of piquing interest to know what follows.

"Demon of the Whirling Disks," by James Guyson, a new writer, strikes also a new note in fiction, a note that echoes with a tinge of the Edgar Allan Poe weirdness. Joseph Ivers Lawrence will be represented by a particularly strong tale called "The Unforgiving Minute," and the final instalment of "The Star of Adventure" none of you should miss. It contains the most vivid incident of war, the present war, that I have ever read. If you are not following the story, by all means take it up now, with the aid of the synopsis, if you please, so you will be fully equipped to appreciate the stunning after-the-battle scene, with a Frenchman, a German and an American for the sole actors therein.

ROASTING NEW YORK

I was under the impression that I went to the other extreme rather than to pat New York on the back in my remarks about the city in the June Log. At any rate, the idea I intended to convey was one of surprise that so many people should wish to undertake long trips to get here, rather than self-gratulation as a native son of Manhattan that such should be the case. Yet here comes Mr. Barry taking up the cudgels for Chicago in great shape, just as if I had started in to make invidious comparisons. Nothing was further from my intentions. As a matter of fact, New Yorker though I am, I'm fond of Chicago, am quite sensible of its many good points, and shall welcome the next chance of making a visit there. Meanwhile, you readers will doubtless enjoy Mr. Barry's letter. It's a knock, but for once the story-writers get a rest, and New York City must stand the blows. Although written at a hotel in Chicago, our correspondent evidently belongs now to the City of the Angels, of which you are to read in our novel next month.

Los Angeles, California.

In your ARGOSY Log-Book of June, you invite opinions of New York City, especially regarding the desire of every one to some time visit the metropolis. Your city is, undoubtedly, a wonderful place, and many there are with a strong desire to visit it. New Yorkers themselves are notedly untraveled, and therefore more or less narrow-minded and monumentally egotistic as regards their city.

To him who has traveled the globe, New York does not appear the great Mecca which it seems to the man from the cross-roads on his initial trip. After one has seen Chicago, for example, a trip to our wonders of the West would be more advantageous from a standpoint of pleasure. I found more of interest in Tokyo, which you tabulate in your paragraph of comparative populations. As a place of residence I find Los Angeles vastly superior for comfort and pleasure.

For industry does not Chicago hold greater inducements? Chicago pioneered in skyscrapers, is first in point of "L" road mileage, underground, freight, and steam-road suburban service. Its parks and driveways are superior to New York's. Your population seems largely composed of the extremely rich and the very poor classes, with the preponderance favoring the latter. Chicago represents the great middle class. As a seaport, Liverpool, Hong Kong, and others are larger in point of naval traffic.

Aside from a few institutions, such as your Metropolitan Museum, churches, Grand Terminal, can be equaled elsewhere. New York by no means has the largest or best of everything, even for the United States. In population and as a money center alone does it lead. Personally, a week of New York suffices me. Other places have their admirers. San Franciscans say: "Every one loves Frisco." In Los Angeles I am constantly meeting people who find Southern California the only place to live. Other towns have everything needful which can be found in "little old New York."

I have no wish to decry New York's greatness, but the largest thing in it is the vanity and egotism of its natives. A man is by no

means "camping out" because he is not within its walls. Every one has some favorite spot; mine is Southern California, which as a place to live or visit (especially if one has seen Chicago or other busy centers) is far more desirable than New York. JOHN J. BARRY.

P.S.—I have enjoyed THE ARGOSY monthly for thirteen years.

WHAT HE LIKED AND DIDN'T

The only drawback to the subjoined is the fact that Mr. Dennison neglects to state how he came to get hold of that first copy of THE ARGOSY which fell into his hands over eleven years ago. His letter, in the main, is just the kind I like to receive, expressing frankly personal likes and dislikes.

Helena, Montana.

The first copy of your magazine that I read was in the early portion of 1905, I think. At any rate the title of the story was "The Land of the Long Night." It was a most excellent story, and a good sample of what THE ARGOSY has been since. You will note that I am not on your subscription list, but being on the move most of the time, I have no permanent address, and have therefore to depend upon the newsstands for my copy of THE ARGOSY.

The Log-Book is a very interesting section of the magazine, and I note that "The Man With the 44 Chest" received quite a bit of praise, of which every bit was fairly earned. The later stories that appealed to me as being most interesting were—"A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park," "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," and "Getting Away From Thompson."

All your authors are good, and no matter what the kickers say about them, it will have to be admitted that there is not a "bum" author on the list of THE ARGOSY writers. However, there appears a foolish story in the April number entitled "Who Is Charles Avison?" But, unlike some of the contributors to the Log-Book, I am not offering that author any advice. I couldn't even have written as good a one as that myself, whatever I think of that story. O. E. DENNISON.

GOOD NEWS FROM DIXIE

Here's another specimen of the sort of letter an editor likes to receive. As he is looking for New York City color, even though now a resident of Georgia, Mr. Broughton will, no doubt, enjoy the Washington Heights novel in this issue, as I hope he did the Bronx story in the last. I have more of Mr. Moran's tales in stock, he will be glad to know.

Savannah, Georgia.

Just a few lines from Dixie in praise of the June ARGOSY. Have just finished the Log-Book, and certainly wish that I had the July number to start on to-night. For a story of adventure, "Ships of Strife" cannot be equaled, in my estimation. I enjoyed every line of it, and think that Captain Dingle should be called on for another story hitting on life on the sea on board the old wind-jammers.

In regard to the short stories, Neil Moran's "Movie Men for a Day" should have first place, although they are all very good. Having lived in New York City for several years, I am looking forward with much interest to the July novel, "A Secret of the Bronx."

G. J. BROUGHTON.

P.S.—Am very glad to say that the stories in THE ARGOSY are not, like the State of Georgia, dry.

SEA FIGHTS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

Modern methods of fighting are by no means as picturesque as were the old sea battles, when ships were lashed side by side and, amid waving swords, men engaged in hand-to-hand encounters. John Paul Jones, for instance, would not have cut much of a personal figure in the North Sea battle between the English and German navies of June 1. Thus it looks as though the present war would put a crimp in sea fights as effective fiction material.

Laguna Beach, California.

I am sending on one dollar for renewal to THE ARGOSY for another year. It is an A No. 1 magazine, and I enjoy reading the stories. All of them are fine. Of course there are some stories people like better than others. I like Bedford-Jones's stories. "Scud of the Banks" was great, and so was the fight between the Bonhomme Richard and the Serapis. THE ARGOSY can't be beat. You can tell your authors I said so. WILLIAM WILLIS.

A COMPLIMENT THAT ISN'T DOUBTFUL

Yours is certainly a peculiar case, Mr. Forrest. You say you are conscious of a feeling of disappointment on finishing reading THE ARGOSY, yet can't get along without it. You refer to something lacking in the make-up. Arrangements have been made for a greater variety in each issue. Possibly this will solve your difficulty. I hope so, and, meantime, must consider your remarks, on the whole, decidedly complimentary to our magazine. What say you, readers?

Messick, Virginia.

My subscription expired with the March issue, and as I am very busy at this season of the year, I thought I would not have time to read THE ARGOSY, so I concluded to let it slide. I find, however, that THE ARGOSY habit is not to be broken off so easily as I thought. Since my subscription expired, I have been under the necessity of making two trips to town, a distance of eighteen miles each way, to secure the April and May issues. In view of the above facts, and as it seems that I simply cannot do without THE ARGOSY, I will have to ask you to

let it come to my address for one year, for which I enclose check in payment.

I do not know whether I am a booster or a knocker, for when I finish reading an ARGOSY I am conscious of a slight feeling of disappointment, and it seems that there is something lacking in the make-up. Yet THE ARGOSY exercises a peculiar fascination for me, so much so in fact that it is the only fiction magazine I read. Perhaps you can diagnose my trouble.

IRA B. FORREST.

DOESN'T WANT TO MISS A NUMBER

Yet another reader who enjoys sea stories. I have in stock a very unique one, to be used possibly next year, entitled "The Undeserted Island."

Woodland Park, Colorado.

In renewing my subscription to THE ARGOSY, I will say a few words in praise of that and the weekly *All-Story*. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY since about the latter eighties and the *All-Story* when it first became the *Cavalier*, and I certainly can't find better stories in any other magazine. Zane Grey's "The Last of the Duanes" and "The Texas Rangers" can't be beat anywhere. All the writers are good. While a few stories do not suit me, I have no complaint to make, as they may suit others, and I don't see how any one can kick on Fred Jackson. I like stories of the North and of the sea, and don't want to miss a number.

L. J. CARRINGTON.

A TEXAN'S RECIPE FOR ENNUI

Authors score one, on account of Mr. Warren's comment below. He writes a breezy letter, so if any of you feel like taking advantage of his postscript, you would doubtless get some enjoyable glimpses of life in the Lone Star State.

Pecan Gap, Texas.

Like Mr. Schneider of Long Island City (June Log), I think THE ARGOSY is a sure cure for lonesomeness, as we have some very quiet times down here in Texas while the cotton is growing, and we people who don't work in the field find that time hangs heavy on our hands sometimes, and we get the jimmies and don't know what to do. But I do; I hunt up THE ARGOSY and pass away the time thataway, and find some corking good stories.

I don't have to read the story to see if it is good. I just look to see who the author is, and I can very near guess nine times out of ten whether it is a good story or not. But anyway, the editors of THE ARGOSY are to be congratulated on the stories they select to put in the good old ARGOSY. Just keep on putting out the dope you have heretofore, and it is an all-around good book for any one.

E. O. WARREN.

P.S.—Would like to hear from some of THE ARGOSY readers, post-card or letter, just for a change.

WHY NEW YORK LURES THEM

My thanks are due Mr. Keyte for the sidelight he throws on the desire to get to New York that seems implanted in the breasts of so many Americans. That he bases his views on an English standpoint makes them none the less worth consideration.

Long Creek, Oregon.

I have just received the June ARGOSY, and I sit up here this evening among the Blue Mountains with nothing particular to do except smoke my pipe. I thought I would drop you a line regarding your query of why citizens desire to go to New York. I suppose for the same reason that most Englishmen want to go to London—namely, because it is their dream city. It was associated in their childhood with wonderful things. One saw pictures of the leading boy in the pantomimes of that city portrayed in the magazines, or we heard father talking to a neighbor of some great financial deal being enacted there, some big trial, some man losing thousands in a day on the exchange; heard our mother talking of some noted divine that had preached there, read stories of its slums, *et cetera*.

Perhaps we saw some one who had come from New York wearing the latest fashion in clothing and with a knowledge of everything under the globe (at least it seemed that way to us). We probably heard the name of that city mentioned twenty times more than that of any other, and it became impressed on our memory. As we grew up we wanted to see the place ourselves, and be part of the human works that helped it to run night and day.

I will not take up any more of your space, but after spending two years in London, I am convinced that the imagination of the child is very different from the reality that faces the man. With best wishes to fellow readers of the Log.

FRANCIS KEYTE.

FROM ONE CAPTAIN TO ANOTHER

A fine compliment to our June novel is paid in the subjoined. Oftentimes stories of the sea are severely criticised by sailors as being all wrong from the "facts" standpoint. But, you see, Captain Dingle is a sailor himself.

Greenwood, Mississippi.

I think "Ships of Strife," by Captain A. E. Dingle, in June ARGOSY, is a story of the first water. It portrays exactly the conditions existing very often between fore and aft in the old days on a "hell ship," unbelievable to some, but facts to others who have experienced them.

CAPTAIN S. DENNIS KELLY.

A CANADIAN OBJECTS

Mr. Thorpe, a Canadian, seems to feel aggrieved that New York is rated with a bigger population than London. For his consolation I will tell him that my figures were quoted from the latest issue (that for 1916) of the *World*

Almanac, which in a footnote states: "Population of some cities shown in this list has been, temporarily at least, affected by the war in Europe." So, after peace has settled down again upon the transatlantic map, Mr. Thorpe may see his beloved London once more in first place. Of course, he has discovered ere this that "The Lure of New York" is not the title of a story.

Montreal, Canada.

Having seen a piece in the Log-Book for June announcing a new story, "The Lure of New York," in which you state that New York has a larger population than London, I am sending you two clippings from the "Answers Column" of the Montreal *Star.* They will explain themselves. Hoping to see this in print,

Yours, a regular reader,

R. THORPE.

The clippings referred to give London 7,251-358 and New York 5,468,190, while Berlin steps ahead of Paris in third place.

THE WHOLE LAY-OUT SUITS HIM

From the far-off South Sea Islands comes this good word about our magazine. I want to assure Mr. Gabhard that I mean to make THE ARGOSY even better in the next five years than it has been in the past five.

Tutila, Samoa.

As I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for some time, I will endeavor to add a line to THE ARGOSY Log. In my opinion, if you will just give us THE ARGOSY in the future as interesting as in the past five years, nobody should kick, for I think it's the best magazine I have ever read. I like novels and serials, also short stories. I like Franklin and Cook, Cain, and in fact all the writers are good who write for THE ARGOSY. I always read it just as soon as I get it, and sometimes I read it two or three times.

B. H. GABHARD.

HAS YET TO BE BADLY FOOLED

Another side-light on the author matter, the reader who gives his opinion below being quite indifferent as to who writes a story. I should say that, up to date, those on his side are a trifle in the majority.

Princeton, West Virginia.

Find enclosed check to renew my subscription to THE ARGOSY. I note that the price has been reduced back to one dollar, but still THE ARGOSY remains the best magazine in existence. Hope the next change will be to publish twice a month instead of once. The book-length stories are all good, and as to the authors, that makes very little difference to me, as I rarely ever look to see who the writer is, as being published in THE ARGOSY is sufficient proof that it is worth reading, and I have yet to be badly fooled.

F. W. FARMER.

'WHEN HE KEEPS MUM

Here's a man, now in Tennessee, particularly appreciating the local color in the Utica story; so you see the wide appeal our actual place-novels possess, aside from the intrinsic interest of the narrative itself. Incidentally, I may remark that I especially enjoy receiving a letter like the subjoined one that gives a reason for things.

Nashville, Tennessee.

After planning to write to you for the last six months, I have finally decided to act. First let me show my appreciation of "One-Cylinder Sam," "Too Terrible for War," and the John Solomon stories. Your last was splendid—namely, "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park." One reason I liked that story was my knowledge of the old Conkling Park in Utica. I have been in Canada since August, and came south Christmas, and while in the north country I read every number of THE ARGOSY, being hardly able to wait for the next number. I read "One-Cylinder Sam" while in Ontario, and surely enjoyed it immensely for its original scenes around the St. Lawrence and Thousand Islands.

I have no knocks to make. In fact, why should I? No two persons are alike, and why should one criticise a story that some one else likes? If I don't like a story, I keep mum, and hear what the other fellows say about it. For first-class fiction and romance, give me the old ARGOSY.

JOHN WILLIAM DENNIS.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

G. D. Johnson, Memphis, Tennessee, considers the Log-Book the most interesting part of THE ARGOSY, and always reads it first, as there are a good many laughs in it for him. Henry Reiske, Millidgeville, Illinois, has taken THE ARGOSY for ten years, and thinks there is no other quite so good. S. F. Yeluah, Rich Hill, Missouri, being a traveling man, says that though he never misses an issue of THE ARGOSY, he passes up the serials. Mrs. H. J. Stephenson, Victorville, California, writes again to say that if there is anything she likes better than THE ARGOSY it is *more* ARGOSY. Adds: "I like all of the stories fine, but oh, you book-length novel! The kickers deserve to be shot at sunrise." F. J. Guswiler, a commercial traveler, of Roscoe, Pennsylvania, congratulates us on "Ships of Strife," and adds that the perusal of THE ARGOSY is one of the greatest pleasures he experiences on the road. "Any person," he declares, "who fails to get his money's worth out of *any* copy of that publication, must, indeed, be hard to please." Ralph Elerick, Pioneer, Montana, in sending a dollar for a year's subscription, adds: "I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for the last ten years, but have always been where I could get it at the news-stands until now, and you don't have any idea how much one misses it until he gets where he can't get it."

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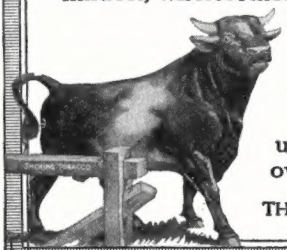

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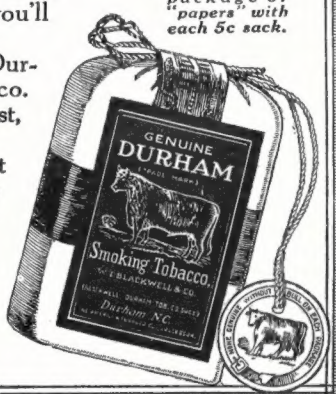

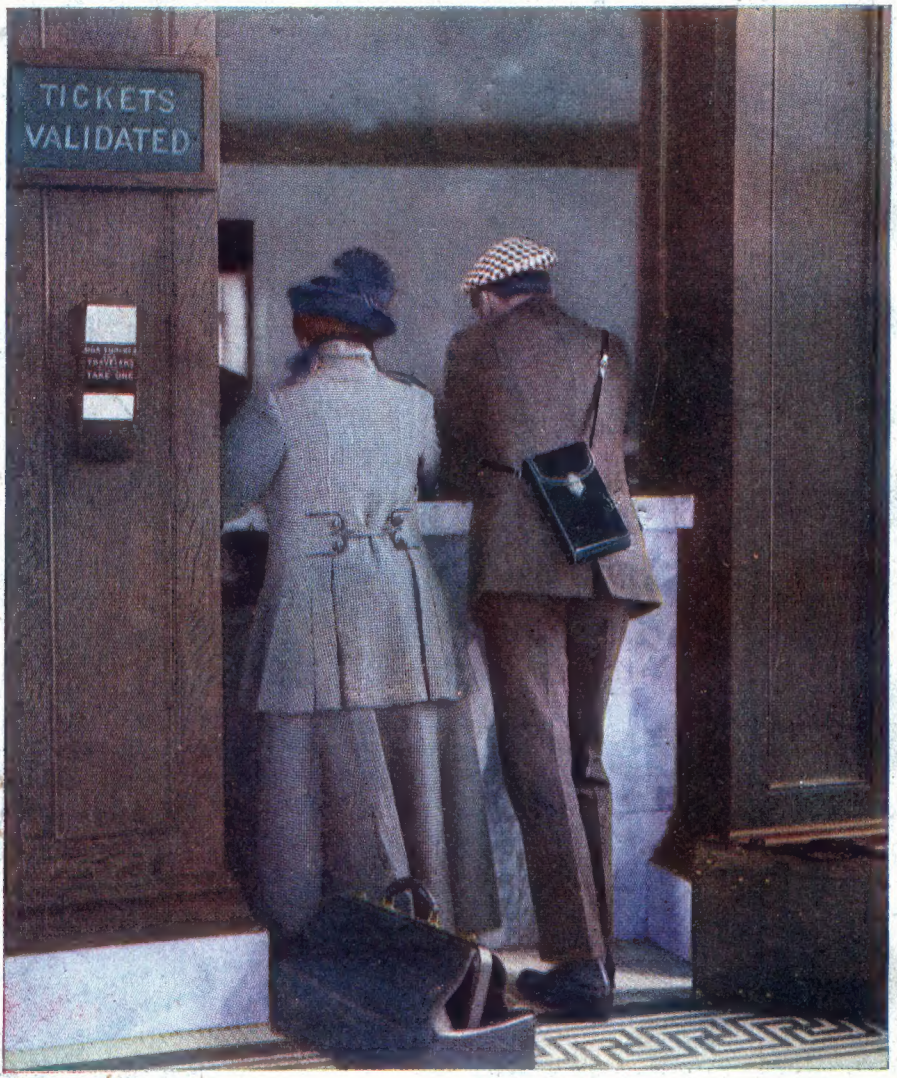

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